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**Legitimising Racism: Howard, Hanson,
and the 1996 'Race Debate.'**

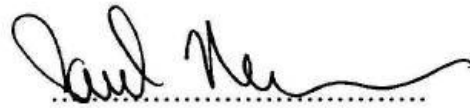
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**Dissertation submitted for examination
for the degree of Master of Arts in English
November 1998**



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The work in this dissertation is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original, except as acknowledged in the text. The material has not been submitted, in whole or part, for a degree at this or any other university.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Paul Newman", written over a horizontal dotted line.

Acknowledgments

Thanks most importantly to my supervisor Leigh Dale, for her encouragement, generosity of ideas, willingness to assist and countless insights which have all helped to force some form of order into the writing of this thesis.

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MASTER OF ARTS IN ENGLISH

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The Master of Arts in English program consists of a combination of research and coursework. The coursework entails completion of Advanced Research Methods which is a compulsory subject. Additional to this a student may choose to take either one or two other subjects. If the student chooses to take **one** other MA subject, the length of the dissertation is 30,000 words; where **two** other MA subjects are chosen, the dissertation is required to be 25,000 words.

Coursework results for this candidate are as follows:

Advanced Research Methods [Satisfactory]

This compulsory subject is directed towards the preparation and formal presentation of a Thesis Proposal, as well as providing some training in advanced research techniques and various professional skills.

Text and Language [Satisfactory]

This subject aims to enable students to become conversant with a body of knowledge about the language analysis of texts. It also aims to enable students to undertake language analyses of texts. The texts to be studied in the course may include face-to-face interactions, print journalism, dialogue in contemporary drama, and literature (poems and novels). Specific texts are chosen with students' interests and background knowledge in mind.

Critical and Cultural Theory [Satisfactory]

Critical and Cultural Theory offers perspectives on the development of literary and cultural studies theory since about 1945, both dealing with key figures that Master of Arts students are expected to know about and placing them within the historical development of various currents within theory and criticism, and addresses particular areas problematised by recent theory such as author/authority, difference, reading and speaking positions, history, desire, etc. Areas of disagreement/contestation between different approaches are foregrounded, with the side effect of encouraging students to consider how their own approaches may be challenged or enriched by perspectives from other currents of criticism.

All subjects are graded on a Satisfactory / Not Satisfactory basis.

Dr Chris Tiffin

Director of Postgraduate Studies

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Abstract

Legitimising Racism: Howard, Hanson, and the 1996 'race debate.'

This thesis analyses the conservative political discourse on race issues – Aboriginal welfare, native title, reconciliation, multiculturalism, and Asian immigration – from the period of Pauline Hanson's election in March 1996, to the passing of John Howard's 'Ten point plan' in July 1998. This period covers Hanson's rise, the creation of her One Nation Party, and its electoral debut in the Queensland state election of June 1998. Conservative discourse here refers to the discourse of the political right in Australia: the Liberal and National parties at state and federal level, Hanson, and industry lobby groups such as the National Farmers' Federation, which have had such significant influence during the native title debates.

Since Hanson's election, parliamentary conservatives have situated themselves in a confused relationship to her: led by Prime Minister John Howard, they have exhibited a strong desire to align themselves with Hanson's ideas and supporters, that had to be balanced against a need to be distanced from her when her racism threatened to become electorally damaging to the Liberal/National Party cause. It is argued that a politics of blame emerges in this conservative discourse, a targeting of racial difference through derogatory comments on Aborigines and Asians, coded within protestations about cultural self-defence, or about the right to 'speak out.' The strong sense of grievance established by independent Member of Parliament Pauline Hanson in the post-election period drew on the 'special pleading' for the majority implied by the Coalition's 1996 electoral strategy, and gained sustained public popularity. As an extension of complaint about an ostensible

restraint on 'free speech,' this grievance was worked into a mythology of victimisation, created and sustained by rhetorical concepts that gained considerable currency in the public/political sphere. Hanson's scapegoating of Aborigines and Asians was given freedom in this context, able to be defended on the grounds of her membership of the 'mainstream' and validated in terms of a rejection of 'political correctness.' It is suggested that this 'race debate' forms the basis of the conservative reaction to the previous Labor government's endorsement of positive manifestations of racial difference in the national identity, which was expressed in the acceptance of native title and multiculturalism and gestures towards self-determination for Aborigines such as ATSIC.

This thesis analyses the underlying cultural and historical links that bind this conservative discourse on race in its Australian context, arguing that in its attack on racial difference, this conservative discourse draws on a history of race relations, which includes the dispossession of Aborigines, their subsequent treatment, and the maintenance of the White Australia Policy until the 1960s. This discourse mobilises the recently revived tradition of negative public evaluations of Australia's racial others, which have involved both John Howard and history professor Geoffrey Blainey in issues of Asian immigration and Aboriginal land rights. Blainey's continued influence highlights the importance of Australian History and history in the negotiation of these public issues.

This thesis argues that a racist, colonialist discourse was deployed by conservative elements at a crucial moment of the resolution of Australia's white/black relations. Hanson's agenda, and the Howard government's alignment with it, can be seen as a timely justification of the aggressions and oppressions of the past, part of an attempt to minimise the restitution due to Aborigines on the basis of their past treatment by the colonisers and governments of Australia. An analysis of the usefulness and timeliness of the public racism of these mutually enforcing agendas is therefore central to this thesis.

Public racism has been most extensively deployed in opposition to the existence of native title, following from the High Court's Wik decision in December 1996. The Wik decision,

which with Mabo has been particularly threatening to conservative ideology, was the subject of an often hysterical public debate; like so many of the 'race issues' which gain public prominence, the attacks on native title reveal the extent to which Australia is inextricably tied to its colonialist past. It will be argued that both Labor and the Coalition shared a belief about the racial tolerance of white Australians, but it was derived from very different mobilisations of the past. The importance of the rise of this conservative discourse on race to Australian nationhood, then, is its strategic manipulation of both the colonialist past and a 'post-colonial' national future. The prominence of this debate in the 1990s refuses to allow the national narrative to leave its colonial roots: it is thus both politically conservative and historically regressive.

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Introduction

Pauline Hanson was disendorsed as a Liberal candidate prior to the 1996 Federal election because of statements she made about the amount of money spent on Aboriginal welfare and the importance attached to Aboriginal deaths in custody. After gaining widespread media attention upon her election as an independent Member of Parliament, Hanson continued to speak out on issues of Aboriginal welfare and reconciliation, and gained national prominence and international notice when she delivered her maiden speech to parliament in September 1996. In this speech Hanson expressed fear over the number of Asians entering the country and criticised the status of Aborigines in Australia, sparking what was widely characterised in the media as a 'race debate.'

The popularity of Hanson's racist sentiments disproved the previous Labor government's assumption, or projection, that most white Australians shared an attitude of a broad tolerance and inclusiveness towards Aborigines and Asians. New Coalition Prime Minister John Howard based his silence in the 'race debate' – his failure to criticise Hanson's policies until May 1997, eight months after her maiden speech – on a vehement rejection of the view that there was racism in Australia, or rather, that Australians were/could be racist. He took the view that under Labor, accusations of 'racism' and of being 'racist' had gained a prominence which was stifling public debate on racial issues. Both Labor and the Coalition therefore shared a belief about the racial tolerance of white Australians, but it was derived from very different perceptions of the past. Whereas Howard took the view that Australians should be proud of a history of tolerance and decency, Labor under Keating had posited the existence of a new era of tolerance that acknowledged and moved away from the failures of Australia's past.

While Howard was keen to establish that a new era of openness in public debate had begun with the election of his Coalition government after thirteen years of Labor rule, Hanson's taking up of the licence for 'free speech' ensured the resultant 'debate' was sustained by

exhuming the racist thinking of Australia's past and blaming Aborigines and Asians for current economic hardship. It will be argued that Howard 'managed' this discrepancy between the popularity of Hanson's racism and his belief in Australia's historical tolerance by distinguishing between Hanson and her followers. The promotion of freedom of speech, and an interview with the Prime Minister conducted by John Laws at the height of the 'race debate,' contain some of Howard's most significant responses to Hanson's maiden speech, which he otherwise ignored, and these will be examined in some detail. In particular it is significant that Howard's failure to defend specific elements of the Australian community from Hanson's attacks coincided with the Coalition's shifts of emphasis in the areas of indigenous issues and immigration, and, most vitally, in its negotiation of the High Court's second major decision on native title, the Wik decision of December 1996.

This thesis analyses the conservative political discourse on race issues – Aboriginal welfare, native title, reconciliation, multiculturalism, and Asian immigration – from the period of Hanson's election in 1996 through to the passing of John Howard's amended 'Ten point plan,' the Coalition's legislative enactment of the High Court's Wik decision, in July 1998. This period covers Pauline Hanson's rise, the creation of her One Nation Party, and its electoral debut in the Queensland state election of June 1998. Conservative discourse here refers to the discourse of the political right in Australia – the Liberal and National parties at state and federal level, Hanson, and industry lobby groups such as the National Farmers' Federation, which have had such significant influence during the native title debates.

To use conservative discourse in this broad sense does not unduly limit the differences within this range of viewpoints, as the analysis of these issues in the public sphere shows a remarkable consistency in the polarised, partisan alignment. Indeed, some of the Coalition government's hard-line opposition to the various manifestations of Aboriginal self-determination can be attributed to the close alignment of Aboriginal interests to Labor. 'Conservative discourse' does need to be qualified to acknowledge the quite different position of a more obviously humanist, older-style Australian conservatism, represented politically by ex-Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser and intellectually by Robert Manne, as

well as the opposing stance of contemporary Labor politicians Graeme Campbell (on immigration) and Wayne Goss (on native title), but the consistent positioning especially of parliamentary conservatives enables a general use of the term. This discourse is analysed as it was produced in the public sphere – in newspapers, press releases, public statements, and interviews. It is not the reception of these texts that is under analysis in this study, but the particularly direct communicative intention of political discourse in the specific area of ‘race issues.’

In other areas, the use of such simple terminology is less satisfactory, such as the use of ‘Aborigines’ as an all-embracing unitary conception of the various indigenous groups of Australia. The inaccuracy of the term ‘Aborigines’ to describe cultures and communities which have and do experience very different engagements with colonialism is recognised: such generalisations, and the concept of race itself, have been central to the purpose of othering and objectifying such cultural and historical difference throughout white Australia’s past. Nevertheless, in order to engage the conservative discourse on race on its own terms, ‘Aborigines’ is used throughout the thesis, while, for example, attempts are made to demonstrate the extent to which the maintenance of stereotypes of welfare dependency and primitiveness depend on such unitary conceptions of Aboriginal peoples. A similar strategy is adopted with Hanson’s denigration of ‘Asians.’ Although Hanson has often used a tendentiously broad definition of Asians to increase immigration figures in support of her anti-Asian immigration stance, it is understood that it is the occupants of East and South-East Asia that Hanson generally refers to, and the threat which their geographical proximity, high populations, and racial difference pose and have always posed in the minds of those desiring to maintain ‘white Australia.’

This conservative discourse on race predominantly avoids explicit racism but, as I argue in Chapter One, is racist in its consistent deployment of ‘race speech’: negative identifications of Aborigines and Asians which demonstrate their cultural ‘incompatibility’ in relation to the elusive values of Australia’s national identity. Geoffrey Blainey has been instrumental in establishing cultural difference as a natural and legitimate method for discriminating

against others, in his arguments against Asian immigration and Aboriginal land rights made throughout the 1980s. It will be seen that this deployment of the term 'incompatibility' is a targeting of racial difference that is usually coded within protestations about cultural self-defence, or of the right to 'speak out,' where such speech consists of derogatory comments on Aborigines and Asians. This can be seen prior to 1996 in the politics of those such as the National Party's Bob Katter and Labor's Graeme Campbell, whose willingness to 'play the race card' involved the use of a discourse designed to appeal to and mobilise racist sentiment. It is argued that the emergence of this discourse in the 1996 'race debate,' after token pre-election opposition by Coalition leaders to the expression of racist sentiments by some Coalition party figures, was a reaction to the prominence of Aboriginality and multiculturalism in the Australian public sphere, and as a deliberate attack upon the legitimacy of these identities.

While some Coalition politicians and conservative commentators challenged the anti-Asian element of Hanson's expression of anti-Aboriginal and anti-Asian beliefs because of the potential damage to investment, tourism, and education, her denigration of Aborigines was met with considerably less resistance. Hanson's agenda could be split according to political requirements: two of the most extreme anti-native title campaigners, National Party leaders Rob Borbidge and Tim Fischer, were outspoken in their challenges to Hanson's anti-Asian sentiment. It is because of the strength and persistence of anti-Aboriginal sentiment that this thesis primarily critiques the anti-Aboriginal element of the Hanson agenda. As Verity Burgmann has argued, the anti-Aboriginal/anti-Asian corollary is one which is representative of an old-style Australian racism (2), which genuinely harks back to a golden era when the White Australia Policy governed who was allowed into the country, and Aboriginal people had few rights.

The revival of this old-style Australian racism, which Hanson openly espouses and Howard was for so long prepared to tolerate, was probably never going to result in the return of a discriminatory immigration policy. But the political attitudes signalled by Hanson and Howard have had a very substantial policy effect in the area of indigenous issues, especially in regard to

native title. This thesis argues that the importance of publicly legitimate racism does not inhere in the question of individual racism, but with the uses to which racism and the denigration of particular groups can be put. For this reason it is advantageous to introduce Albert Memmi's definition of racism – "the generalized and final assigning of values to real or imaginary differences, to the accuser's benefit and at his victim's expense, in order to justify the former's own privilege or aggression" (186). In this way, as Stam puts it, "[r]acism, for Memmi, is almost always a rationale for an already existing or contemplated oppression" (4). The importance of the *use* value of racism indicated here is adopted: this thesis takes the moment of Hanson and Howard's use of racism to argue that the way in which Australia's history as anti-Asian and, perhaps even more constitutively of the national character, anti-Aboriginal, has been mobilised to justify the reassertion of a position of privilege for white society. Australian nationalism has been founded on racial exclusivity and the denigration of other races that this and the legitimisation of the dispossession of Aboriginal people has required. It is the strength of this racist sentiment throughout Australia's history that enables Hanson to offer a return to a time of unchallenged white dominance – "In the same year that anti-immigration leagues were founded (1861), editorial cartoons were captioned 'Australia for the Australians'" (White 32).

In regard to the usefulness of the public deployment of racism, Hanson's agenda and the Howard government's alignment with it can be seen as *timely* justifications of the aggressions and oppressions of the past, made in an attempt to minimise the restitution to be given to Aborigines on the basis of their past treatment by the colonisers and governments of Australia. The denigration of Aborigines and Asians functions to demonstrate their undeserving status in Australian society; their ability to participate in Australia is once again predicated on their doing so in the terms of white Australia. It is argued that the re-authorisation of racism was a conservative reaction to the previous Labor government's endorsement of positive manifestations of racial difference in the national identity, including an acceptance of multiculturalism, native title, and gestures towards Aboriginal self-determination such as ATSIC. As this race-oriented reaction prevailed, institutions such as ATSIC and the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission, established as counter measures and

correctives to past oppressions, came under attack.

The strategic timeliness of this debate is manifested in the quantity and prominence of media coverage of Hanson, which is central to the public influence of her racism. From very early in her term it was obvious that the media was incapable of ignoring her, as the novelty of political independence, her voice, gender, and 'ordinariness' all combined with her subject matter to produce a sustained resonance – Hanson was able to tap into “a relentless history of pejorative media portrayals of Aboriginals and Indigenous issues” (Craig 44). It is also because of the way that Aboriginals have always been “ideologically constructed as a problem population” (Meadows 31) that Hanson has been able to effectively blame them for their own problems, and make race fundamental to her appeal. While there are issues which are undeniably noteworthy – the obvious public popularity of Hanson's comments, the formation of a new political party which had immediate opinion poll success, and the attempt to brand Aboriginals as cannibals – a distinct lack of perspective has been a feature of media reportage of Hanson. This has been most pronounced in the breathless manner in which reporting of Hanson's ideas has occurred, the sense of revelation which is attached to her claims about Aboriginal welfare, poverty or criminality. The fact that Hanson's concepts have been dominant concerns for the (extreme) right for many years, and have been consistently voiced by other nationally-elected representatives such as Campbell in Western Australia and Katter in Queensland, is consistently ignored.

It has been Hanson's willingness to reiterate and stand by her statements, freed from the restrictions of party politics, that has helped give her such *legitimacy* in the public sphere and guaranteed her coverage. Prime Minister Howard often included the media in his criticism of the attention given to Hanson's policies, but his own reactions to her also significantly legitimised her agenda. His decision not to respond to her maiden speech did not, as he had frequently predicted, result in her demise: “In six months, people will look back in amazement and say, good heavens, what was that all about? I just think this obsession with just one speech is ridiculous” (qtd. in Millet 1). In a similar way, while the media's coverage of the 1998

Queensland election was largely seen as increasing Hanson's vote,¹ the issue which dominated the coverage was the approach of the Liberal and National parties to Hanson and One Nation.

The Borbidge Coalition government's allocation of preferences to One Nation eclipsed all other issues in the election campaign – at one stage Queensland Tourism Minister Bruce Davidson sparked a furore with his claim that he would “always” place even the Nazi party ahead of the ALP, in justification of the Queensland Liberal Party's decision to preference One Nation ahead of Labor (Roberts and Tingle 8). The Prime Minister also generated media coverage for Hanson with his attack on her after a speech she gave to parliament on June 2. Howard, who the day before had reiterated his position of ignoring Hanson, claimed that parts of her speech “bordered on the deranged” and that it “motivated racist sentiment” (Interview with Fran Kelly). While he avoided the ascription of racism to Hanson, Howard gave substance to the perception that Hanson was being victimised by the major parties – while Hanson had always espoused a simple and limited agenda, she is obviously not “deranged.” The preference decision and Howard's attack were indicative of the confused position of parliamentary conservatives towards Hanson since her election: a strong desire to align with Hanson's ideas and supporters, that had to be balanced against a need to be distanced from her when racism looked to be electorally damaging. Therefore while it is clear that the media has not been blameless in the perpetuation of Hanson and her limited range of ideas, the argument of this thesis is that there has been a sustained willingness by the Coalition and other conservative elements to capitalise on her popularity.

This thesis analyses the underlying cultural and historical links that bind this conservative discourse on race in its particularly Australian context. The political and media events – Hanson's election, the formation of One Nation, and public discussions of reconciliation and native title – are linked by the persistent redeployment of negative evaluations of difference which are legitimised by the proclamation of the absolute priority given to ‘free speech,’ a

¹ In a *Courier-Mail* opinion poll taken on May 23 1998, days after the election was announced, One Nation registered eighteen percent of the vote. While One Nation support grew to twenty-three percent on election day, this may also be attributable to reluctance from Hanson supporters to declare their allegiance to pollsters.

position analysed in the following chapter. The ostensible need to re-establish the right to 'speak out' was sustained by the portrayal of white/ordinary Australians as victims of 'political correctness.' In claiming the victimisation of 'mainstream Australia' by indigenous Australians and other historically oppressed groups, both Hanson and Howard plead the oppression of the oppressors. Chapter Two critiques the concepts which gain currency in this context – the Coalition's 1996 election slogan "For All of Us," the struggle against 'political correctness,' and the need to represent 'mainstream Australians.' These intentions were to be pursued at the expense of the minority groups who had supposedly captured the public agenda, a belief epitomised by Hanson's bid to represent indigenous people as counter-hegemonic to 'mainstream Australian' society.

These rhetorical strategies generate simple dichotomies such as 'free speech' against 'political correctness,' or the 'mainstream' against 'special interests,' propositions which eliminate the need for reasoned arguments. The conservative negotiation of the implications of the changed historical practices of the last twenty years has seen the adoption of a similar strategy through an opposition to the 'black armband view' of history, although Henry Reynolds' coining of the term 'white blindfold' suggests the preparedness of the Left to engage in similar practices. Howard takes the pejorative use of the 'black armband view' of history from Geoffrey Blainey, as an argument against the validity of 'intergenerational guilt' or the possibility that contemporary white Australians be held accountable for Australia's racist past. Chapter Three argues that at the base of Howard and Blainey's argument is a desire to reassert the importance and effect of imperial history, and to maintain a national identity which depends once again on a history of material progress, cultural transmission, and national pride. The Hanson response to the histories and anti-racist narratives which challenge the supremacy of the pioneer/explorer version of the past is an agenda designed to re-impose whiteness as foundational to the teleology of the Australian nation through the discrediting of Aboriginality and Aboriginal culture.

The Coalition's approach to native title has demonstrated a similar lack of respect for Aboriginal culture – aided by Hanson's popularity, the Coalition government achieved the *de*

facto extinguishment of native title. Native title had always had limited acceptance amongst conservatives, and, with the Wik decision of 1996, it became the subject of an often hysterical debate. Chapter Four analyses the almost total denial of the validity of native title which has driven the Howard government's response to its existence: native title represents a significant challenge to the right because of the threat it poses to particularly conservative beliefs about the sovereignty of the nation, the success of the colonial venture, and a national history of cultural transmission. Wik, like so many of the Aboriginal issues which gain public prominence, reveals the extent to which Australia is inextricably tied to its colonialist past. It functions as "a sign of the historical relationality from which neither the settler nor the indigene can be separated: the indigene cannot be relegated to something that is merely chronologically prior; the settler can't merely come at the end of history" (Lawson, "From Asymptote to Zeugma" 5-6). At an important moment in the recognition of Aboriginal land rights in Australia, public racism gained a distinct legitimacy, a demonstration of the use value of racism as a rationale for continuing oppression.

Chapter 1: The Free Speech Response

Pauline Hanson's political agenda has dominated political discussion in Australia since her election as Member for Oxley at the 1996 Federal poll. This agenda has been not so much a policy outline as a discourse on race issues, designed to challenge the position and presence of Aborigines and Asians in Australian society. While intended to appeal to and mobilise racial sentiment, this discourse is generally devoid of explicit racism or straightforward assertions of racial superiority. Hanson's expression of her beliefs has been part of the formation of a new paradigm for acceptable public discourse, established by Prime Minister John Howard's invitation to Australians to speak out on race, his proposal to encourage 'free speech.' This argument explained the naming of racists and racism as consequences of the "pall of censorship" that was said to have existed under the previous Labor Government. This new openness in debates on immigration and Aboriginal issues was promoted as being a benefit to the country, an enhancement of the democratic principle of free speech. Within the framework of Howard's response to Pauline Hanson's maiden speech, this chapter examines the outcome of this 'freeing of speech.' The 'free speech' argument directed towards those 'silenced' on issues of Aboriginal welfare and Asian immigration – by implication those white Australians dissatisfied with existing policies – is a licencing which needs to be viewed within white Australia's long history of racist, exclusionary practices.

Often assumed to be symbolically central to the Australian psyche, race has always been significant in Australian discourses of nation. Belief in the superiority of white races and the need to keep Australia 'pure' white has informed and sustained both the dispossession of Aboriginal people, and a constant and only recently receding (if still powerful) fear of the 'yellow peril' – Asian invasion of the land. While such beliefs have lost their influence on official policies, one of the responses from those wanting to maintain an emphasis on or

preference for racial or cultural homogeneity has been to claim that Australians are no longer able to talk about issues involving different racial groups. John Howard's licencing of a public discourse on race placed importance on Australians' ability to criticise Asian immigration, Aboriginal welfare and land rights. This has been a personal issue for Howard since the responses to his endorsement of Geoffrey Blainey's ideas about cultural 'incompatibility' and social cohesion when Howard was Opposition Leader in 1988.

In 1984 Blainey sparked a 'Great Immigration Debate' with his expression of the belief that there was a danger posed by Asian immigration, casting this threat to Australian society in terms of an invasion: "The old White Australia policy said offensively to half the world 'keep out,' but the new surrender Australia policy quietly says to that half of the world 'come in'" (qtd. in Langley 3). Blainey's call for a reduction in Asian immigration was based on the claim that "The pace of Asian immigration to Australia is now well ahead of public opinion" (qtd. in Haley 1). John Howard had actually spoken against Blainey's arguments in 1984, yet in 1988 was foremost in endorsing Blainey's renewed call for discriminatory immigration regarding Asians, saying that "It would be in our immediate term interests and supportive of social cohesion if it [Asian immigration] was slowed down a little so that the capacity of the community to absorb were greater" (qtd. in Grutzner 3). Pauline Hanson, in her maiden parliamentary speech in September 1996, similarly if more crudely expressed the fear that Australia was being "swamped by Asians," and that Aborigines were privileged over whites.

Within this historical/political discourse such arguments against Asian presence and the recognition of Aboriginal rights are expressed in terms of opposition to the 'divisiveness' caused by cultural incompatibility and difference; explicit expressions of racism in the form of racial hierarchies are absent. These speakers and their supporters have therefore rejected the accusation that such comments have been motivated by racism, on the grounds that defence of Australia's 'way of life' is an acceptable rationale for some form of discrimination against racial difference:

the concept of racism is (still) largely understood in the classical, ideological sense, of seeing other ethnic or racial groups as being

inferior, or as overt, official, institutional practices, as is the case for apartheid. The more 'modern,' subtle and indirect forms of ethnic or racial inequality, and especially the 'racism,' or rather 'ethnicism' based on constructions of cultural difference and incompatibility, is seldom characterized as 'racism,' but at most as xenophobia, and more often than not, as legitimate cultural self-defence. (van Dijk 93)

Given this traditional conception of racism as an overt institutional practice or direct assertion of the inferiority of others, to be characterised as racist carries an extremely negative connotation, with the paradigmatic examples for Western civilisation being Nazi Germany and South African apartheid.

As van Dijk argues, this conventional limiting of racism to its most extreme and explicit manifestations allows the expression of a 'respectable' level of public discourse, which encodes overtly racist sentiment within articulations of cultural difference. As contained within rational discourse, or, in the 1996 'race debate' and beyond, the rhetoric of a white Australian nationalism which enjoyed official political support until the 1960s, this sentiment may escape being identified as racist. Van Dijk's identification of arguments for cultural protection as an evolution in racism¹ exposes this rationalisation of cultural incompatibility as a more subtle method of excluding others. The focus on cultural difference, as Brown has argued in his analysis of Blainey's public comments, is a "naturalization of cultural discrimination [which] gives a respectability and a legitimacy to sets of practices which are, theoretically, forms of racism that *have always had a cultural basis*" (76). As well as insecurity about the capacity of the historically insulated white Australian culture to absorb or adapt to cultural otherness, such arguments share a belief in the inherent, unchanging nature of both Asian and Aboriginal culture, deploying "systems of exclusion which are no less rigid for having their basis in cultural rather than in immutable physical differences" (Brown 76-77). In Australia, the clash between the inherent 'primitiveness' of Aboriginal culture and material progress has been a 'fact' used to demonstrate the illegitimacy of Aboriginal land rights throughout the 1980s and 1990s; Labor politicians of the late 1940s spoke of limiting post-war immigration to those migrants of a similar 'standard of living' to reassure their constituents about the European rather than Asian

¹ See also Barker, *The New Racism*, and Gilroy, *There Ain't no Black in the Union Jack*, for earlier studies of this evolution.

The public legitimacy of these newer formulations of racism depends not only on an absence of institutionalised or explicit racism, but on the use of categories which are salient in different – if related – contexts: “Apart from the way that racial meanings are inferred rather than stated openly, these new forms are distinguished by the extent to which they identify race with the terms ‘culture’ and ‘identity,’ terms which have their own resonance in antiracist orthodoxy” (Gilroy 53). Labor’s endorsement of multiculturalism – carried on from Whitlam and Malcolm Fraser’s Coalition government – and the cultural prominence of Aborigines, had meant that race was publicly foregrounded in a way that many white Australians seem to have found unacceptable – crucially, these ‘other’ groups were now able to speak for themselves through ethnic lobby groups and ATSIC. In this way the prominence of Aboriginality and multiculturalism have not reformed the popularity of racist opinion, but produced a public visibility for non-white Australians which has been unacceptable to the racism of those such as Hanson, unable to contemplate a national identity beyond (the homogeneity of) the White Australia policy. An example of this rejection of Aboriginality can be seen in Hanson’s oft-quoted statistics on the rise of Aboriginal numbers from the 1970s to the 1990s, which she interprets as evidence of the inauthenticity of Aboriginality (and Aborigines) rather than an increased ability or willingness to identify with the category enabled by a greater societal acceptance of Aboriginal culture.

It is according to his belief in a traditional conception of racism that John Howard, since his election as Prime Minister, has contested accusations that he, Pauline Hanson, or her supporters are racist.² This accusation, or at least the accusation that racial sentiment has been mobilised, has at times stemmed from the Howard government’s dealings with ATSIC, native title, Asian immigration and Pauline Hanson. Howard’s rejection of the use of the term racist occurred most famously on September 22 1996, in a speech to the Liberal Party state convention in Brisbane, when he spoke of the removal of the “pall of censorship on certain issues” (qtd. in Lehmann and Sweetman 1). Less than two weeks after Pauline Hanson’s

² While this adherence is for the most part inferred, Howard spoke explicitly on this definition of racism in an *AM* interview with Fran Kelly on June 3 1998.

maiden speech, amid calls for the Prime Minister to repudiate her views, Howard effectively authorised her right to speak and signalled his tolerance of her race-based political platform. As a result the maiden speech, with its claims that Aborigines were not the most disadvantaged group in Australia, but enjoyed privileges over whites, that Australia's racial situation was comparable to Northern Ireland and Bosnia, that Australia was in danger of being swamped by Asians, and that Australia should review its membership of the United Nations, was left uncriticised by the government.

The 'free speech' that Howard referred to – "on certain issues" – was specifically a discourse on race, used for the expression of long-held right-wing concerns over the policy of self-determination in indigenous affairs and the over-promotion of immigration/multiculturalism in Australian society. According to the *Courier-Mail*, "Howard told the Liberal conference that since the election of the Federal Coalition Government, Australians now believed they were able to speak out without living in fear of being branded a racist or a bigot" (Lehmann and Sweetman 1). This was therefore less an argument for 'free speech' *per se* than a specific attack upon the use of the terms 'racist' and 'bigot' as acceptable in public discourse, and a deliberate invalidation of the language of anti-racism: an anti-'free speech' argument. Howard's specific attack was informed by a perception of Labor-led criticisms of racism as being extravagant and unnecessary; this re-coding of 'race speech' as 'free speech' enables *anti* anti-racism to be used as a justification for the expression of racism, as Howard's legitimisation of Hanson's maiden speech demonstrates.

The proximity of the 'free speech' statement to Hanson's provocative maiden speech suggests that Howard viewed the expression of Hanson's beliefs positively, as symptomatic of the renewal of 'free speech' under his government, rather than being something in need of correction or reply. Howard justified this position by representing the 'silencing' effected by anti-racism as being more dangerous and/or damaging in its effects than any potential racism, which requires that combating anti-racism take priority over the need to address racism. The key to the success of this representation was present in the September 1996 'free speech' argument: "[Howard] poured scorn on a newspaper cartoon published 3.5 years ago at the

height of the native title legislation debate which depicted him riding a horse and shooting Aborigines” (Lehmann and Sweetman 1).

Howard therefore used a *personal* example of being “branded” racist to demonstrate his approval of the fact that Australians “now believed they were able to speak out.” The media, or at least this section of it, had been transformed by the election of the Howard government, with Australian society generally, into a more open forum for the expression of negative ideas *on race*. The personal nature of Howard’s defensiveness, significant because of the accusations of racism made against him after his 1988 comments on Asian immigration, is therefore extended so as to become a defence of Australian society – or more specifically, those members of it who share his views, confirming the link between positive self-presentation in the individual and social dimensions of racism denial posited by van Dijk (89). Howard capitalises on the perception that public dissenters on the issues of Aboriginal welfare or immigration have been ‘branded’ or censored, a view fostered in Hugh Mackay’s claim about the reaction of Australians to the treatment of Blainey and then Opposition Leader Howard, in their call for reduced Asian immigration:

Australians recognise that it is very easy to be branded ‘racist’ when debating the subject of [im]migration and multiculturalism, and they note with some horror the hostility which was directed at such public figures as Geoffrey Blainey and John Howard when they attempted to open up the migration debate in the late 1980s. (*Reinventing Australia* 163)

Asian immigration, in particular, has frequently been characterised by its critics as an issue which (white) Australians have ‘never been consulted on’ – the implied outcome of ‘consultation’ with ‘the people,’ on whether Australia should have a non-discriminatory immigration policy, is that it would be qualified in some way, if not rejected outright. This claim is made despite the fact that by the mid-1960s, when the ‘White Australia Policy’ began to be removed, opinion polls suggested only minority support for racial exclusiveness. Twenty percent of people were in favour of the total exclusion of non-European migrants at this time, compared to a figure as high as fifty-seven percent in the

mid-1940s (Markus 188). The ‘branding’ of racists that Howard is claiming to resist is similarly difficult to substantiate. While there is a case to be made against the reductive bent of anti-racism (Cohen 63), and its tendency to demonise racists as deficient or excessive (Wark 255), there was little evidence of this or the ‘branding’ of racists in the 1996 Federal election campaign period, despite the fact that some Labor policies and protocols on ‘race speech’ were under challenge.

During the January-March 1996 Federal election campaign some (predominantly right-wing) candidates specifically invoked the ‘problem’ of Aboriginal welfare. Race was recognised as an issue of extreme political sensitivity: the prominence given to candidates Bob Katter, Bob Burgess, Graeme Campbell and Pauline Hanson made race the most remarked on issue of the election campaign in the media (Kalantzis, “Coalition gets the big picture” 11). Bob Katter, who had previously shown a willingness to ‘play the race card’ to his electorate, was joined by another north Queensland National Party candidate, Bob Burgess, in the use of race in the election campaign as a political tool. Both Burgess’ Australia Day characterisation of citizenship ceremonies as “dewogging,” and Katter’s reference to “slanty-eyed ideologues,” together with his statement that only Aborigines and rich people could afford rural education, gained sustained media attention. The past willingness of Katter and Labor’s Graeme Campbell to use racial issues to gain popularity with particular sectors of the electorate suggests that their invocations of race were deliberate. In 1996, Katter, in particular, was keen to establish his statements as having been made in opposition to the “southern media,” indicating that (north) Queenslanders knew the true merits of his statements.

Both National Party candidates were ‘silenced’ by National Party leader Tim Fischer over their statements, as he condemned the use of “racial terminology” (qtd. in Franklin and Madigan 2). John Howard, as Opposition Leader, was also quick to distance himself from the candidates, expressing his belief that “those remarks are simply unacceptable in our ranks” (qtd. in Brough and Riley 1). At this point Pauline Hanson was disendorsed for an interview she gave to the *Courier-Mail*. Having previously ignored warnings to retract statements she had made in a January 6 letter to the *Queensland Times*, in this interview Hanson criticised the social

inequality 'promoted' by Aboriginal welfare, and claimed that the Government was "looking after the Aborigines too much" because they received a "tremendous amount of pay-outs" (qtd. in Lamperd and Swanwick 2). As an assertion of the Liberal Party's 'liberal' credentials, and probably because she was given no genuine chance of electoral success, Hanson was disendorsed.

It is difficult to find direct accusations of racism toward these candidates in the media. Each of Campbell, Katter, Burgess and Hanson, and especially the three males,³ are characterised as "maverick," with the implication of unorthodox or independent thought. Right-wing newspaper columnist Lawrie Kavanagh referred to the "undoubted racist remarks" ("Tolerance" 25) of Katter and Burgess, but most other print media coverage of the events, including the *Courier-Mail* and the *Sydney Morning Herald*, which both gave detailed coverage of the remarks and responses to them, referred only to the "alleged racism" of the statements, usually giving no source, implied or otherwise, for the allegation. The use of 'allege' or scare quotes introduces doubt and marks distance (van Dijk 106) – suggesting that racism may well be an unwarranted accusation. A reluctance to characterise any actions as racist – in this case, a persistent mobilisation of racial sentiment with the objective of electoral gain – was therefore in existence before the election, and a caution observed in making the strong personal accusation of racism. This challenges Howard's assertion that the branding of racists and racism in the media was excessive.

Howard's 'free speech' address was significantly pre-empted during this 1996 election campaign by National Party candidate Bob Burgess, who also valued an untrammelled right to speak out on 'race issues.' Following from his "dewogging" remark on Australia Day, Burgess gained continued media attention through the expression of anti-immigration/anti-Asian views, including his belief that there was a need for Australia to look towards its "traditional" sources of migrants, and that Australia had "sold the farm" to Asia; he also registered disgust that during a night out in Sydney, "I couldn't see a white face around the place" (qtd. in Kingston and Riley 8). Elaborating on his remarks,

³ Hanson later becomes widely characterised as the "outspoken" independent Member of Parliament.

Burgess had said that he was a “fan” of those people, such as Graeme Campbell, Bruce Ruxton, and Wilson Tuckey, who spoke out and did “not live in fear of being branded a racist, a bigot, and a homophobe” (qtd. in Kingston and Riley 8).

Questioned on the first comments, Howard was reluctant to speak on the issue – “He is not my candidate and he won’t win the seat” – and walked away from the microphone at the press conference at which he was asked numerous questions about Burgess. In the ‘free speech’ address though, Howard echoed Burgess in proclaiming that “people can now talk about certain things without living in fear of being branded a bigot or as a racist or any of the other expressions” (qtd. in Greene A2). In both Burgess’ comments and Howard’s response to Hanson’s maiden speech, the right to express concern over the extent of immigration to Australia, which for conservatives in the recent past has meant the degree of Asian presence, is asserted. However political expressions on race had become more publicly acceptable by September 1996 because they had been endorsed by the Coalition government and specifically endorsed by the Prime Minister. Whereas Burgess had been criticised for his version of ‘playing the race card’ and threatened with disendorsement, in the post-election period Hanson was not subject to censure. The almost identical justifications from Burgess and Howard for speaking out on race reveal a number of consistent themes: an emphasis on the need to reject personal attacks; a significant exaggeration of the power of anti-racist discourse; and the valorisation of the ability to speak out on racial issues, which had supposedly been broadened from something done by a few brave individuals to being a characteristic of a more robust Australian society in general.⁴

Howard was eager to claim credit for the societal alteration which he believed had occurred: “If the election of the new Government has done something to make that kind of neo-McCarthyist, zealous, prejudice reaction against something you don’t agree with less acceptable, then I think that is a great thing for the health of democracy in Australia”

⁴ Underlying the formulations of Howard and Burgess is a shared belief in the view that ‘ordinary’ Australians have become the victims of a silencing; the beneficiaries of this ‘victimisation’ have been ‘minority’ groups (see Chapter Two).

(qtd. in Lehmann and Sweetman 1). Howard's attempt to tie the right-wing extremism of McCarthyism to a central part of an anti-racist discourse involves a characteristic reversal of racism by the 'accused'.⁵ Van Dijk outlines the centrality of this reversal of blame to the discourse of racism denial:

Accusations of racism, then, soon tend to be seen as more serious social infractions than racist attitudes or actions themselves, e.g. because they disrupt ingroup solidarity and smooth ingroup encounters: they are felt to ruin the 'good atmosphere' of interactions and situations. Moreover, such accusations are seen to impose taboos, prevent free speech and a 'true' or 'honest' assessment of the ethnic situation. In other words, denials of racism often turn into counter-accusations of intolerant and intolerable anti-racism. (90)

Therefore it makes sense to assert that Australians have been subjected to a McCarthyist, proscriptive campaign, and have suffered a "zealous, prejudice reaction."⁶ The irony of this position is that in Australia it was Bob Menzies, Howard's political idol, who oversaw the hysterical 1950's anti-communism of McCarthyism, including the failed attempt to outlaw the Communist Party. Invoking McCarthyism in a context of racism denial gains its relevance from its historical implications of unjust, extreme, and personal accusations.

In a similar way, despite the explicit 'cultural' discrimination and vilification present in many of her statements, Hanson always rejects the ascription of racism to her beliefs, but unlike Howard, does not regularly extend this to a denial of racism in Australian society. She is more willing to take on the accusation of racism exclusively to her person, with the extra potential for victim status that this provides. Personal denial was a feature of one of her earliest contributions to public debate, with the *Queensland Times*' headline two days after disendorsement – "I'm not a racist," with a supporting quote: "I still believe my comments were not racist." Despite Hanson's powerful anti-Aborigine/Asian sentiment, the concept of classically understood racism carries such negative connotations that its acknowledgment must

⁵ In making this statement, Howard recalled the comments of the other 'maverick' National Party MP of the election campaign, Bob Katter, who spoke of environmentalists as both "feminazis" and McCarthyists (Petersen 2).

⁶ Howard's use of the ahistorical concept of 'prejudice' remains distanced from a specific accusation of racism.

be rejected for Hanson to maintain a positive self-representation and remain electorally palatable.

In addition, rejecting the strong personal accusation of racism frequently allows positive consequences to accrue to the denier. As David Fraser has observed of the establishment of Holocaust-denial claims, this denial of racism helps establish an immediate and almost automatic visibility for defendants as “embattled truth-seekers” (174). In a parliamentary ‘Grievance Debate’ early in December 1996, Hanson’s embrace of this identity – “Ever since I made my maiden speech in this House there has been a vicious, non-stop campaign of abuse and insults against me” – was well established.⁷ Typically, racial stereotypes and right-wing conspiracy theories are therefore able to be passed off as *The Truth*, the title of the Hanson manifesto which contained detailed vilification of Aborigines and Asians, including descriptions of Aboriginal cannibalism and the belief/fear that Australia would soon have a half-cyborg Asian lesbian president.⁸ Increasingly, those who challenged these ‘truth’ claims became those committing more serious transgression than that of racism, speaking against Pauline Hanson and the Howard government’s significant redirections on Aboriginal policy and native title.⁹

Crucially, the *effects* of anti-racist speech when it is constructed in this way outweigh the impact of any possible racism, and anti-racism becomes responsible for social disharmony. This explains the great willingness of Howard and Hanson to censure those who break social taboos (spitting, swearing, shouting, becoming violent) in resisting One Nation, as well as the exaggeration of past criticism of Blainey and Howard which informs the latter’s ‘free speech’ argument. As a consequence of the need to confirm the damaging effects of anti-racism, racism may actually be acknowledged, but only in the context of transferring blame for its emergence onto Labor, anti-racism, or Aborigines themselves. In an ironic recognition of the power of the accusation of being racist, it is claimed that not only are Aborigines and the Left

⁷ Hanson’s need to reiterate this position reached its apogee with the release of a post-assassination video in November 1997. This overdetermination of her position did not damage her status as a serious public-political contributor – indeed the media’s ridicule of the video may have fed the belief in Hanson’s ‘persecution.’

⁸ There are numerous elements seen as ‘scary’ here – fear of the future, fear of contamination (half-cyborg) and Asianness; a misogynist homophobia is also present.

⁹ See the following chapter for the mobilisation of opposition to ‘political correctness’ in this context.

oversensitive to racism, but are themselves racist, and have now instituted a 'reverse racism' which is worse in its effects than racism itself. The concept of racism, so vehemently disavowed by Hanson and Howard, is therefore actually deployed by them in attacking anti-racism. For Pauline Hanson, a central argument is that white Australians have been racially discriminated against, notwithstanding the overwhelming statistical proof of the disadvantaged state of Aborigines.

This view that the Left and Aborigines have acted in a racist way provides a rational basis for the emergence of racism and demonstrates the irrationality of anti-racism. It is a strategy that was used in Hanson's initial contribution to public discourse on race, the January 6 letter to the *Queensland Times* that laid the ground for her disendorsement. Racism – prejudice against whites – is not invoked here; rather the justification or blame for "a racism problem" is ascribed to the alleged inequalities in the welfare system such that it favours Aborigines: "government showers them with money, facilities and opportunities that only these people can obtain no matter how minute the indigenous blood that is flowing through their veins, and this is what is causing racism" ("Equal Justice for All" 14). The burden of blame for the emergence of racism is thereby transferred from racists on to the profligate Labor government and undeserving Aborigines. This government assistance is unjust because some (if not all) Aborigines are genetically inauthentic; more broadly, though, it is the special or different status accorded to Aborigines – it is assistance which "only these people can obtain" – that prompts envy and division. This rare acknowledgment of white racism is excused as the 'natural' by-product of a situation produced by Aborigines and the Labor government's emphasis on racial difference.

Likewise in his rejection of Hanson's 1998 pre-Queensland election speech on the creation of taxpayer-funded Aboriginal states, Howard charged the Left with the responsibility for causing racist sentiment. He noted Western Australian Premier Richard Court's observation that a 'vacuum' had been created by the Senate's refusal to pass the Native Title Amendment Bill, and concluded that approval of the Bill would have meant that "it wouldn't be possible for people like Mrs Hanson to run around Australia saying that native title is going to lead to taxpayer funded Aboriginal states" (qtd. in Johnstone and Franklin 1). Even one of Hanson's

most explicitly racist comments, the suggestion that Aborigines' should be disenfranchised, was met by the defence that it was not the Coalition's 1967 referendum (which Hanson falsely claimed had given Aborigines the vote) that had produced 'bad policies,' but Labor: "Those bad policies came from the Hawke and Keating governments. Not only did their policies permit mal-administration but they also included a tendency to brand any Coalition critic of their aboriginal affairs policies as a racist or a bigot" (Howard, "The 1967 Referendum").

This allocation of blame for racism to the Left and others has, in accordance with Howard's rejection of the terms racist and racism, predominantly been carried out without the use of these terms; the 'code term' of 'free speech' has instead been used to sustain arguments against the (effects of the) Left's irrationality or intolerance. Howard's proscriptive emphasis on accusations of racism was an attempt to create a public discourse on race in which "the very notion of 'racism'" becomes "virtually taboo in accusatory contexts because of its strong negative connotations" (van Dijk 93). This defence becomes available to any public contributors on racial issues, and therefore all accusations of racism, however well substantiated, become difficult to sustain – a difficulty which was reinforced institutionally by the massive funding cuts to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission in the Coalition's first budget.

This prohibition on the use of the term, rather than the presence or the *effect* of racism, was of great significance in the post-election climate of heightened prejudice – the Hanson-led crusade against multiculturalism (primarily Asian immigration) and attacks on welfare funding and land rights for Aborigines helped to legitimate the Howard government's cuts to ATSIC and attempts to re-establish paternalistic measures of accountability on Aborigines' peak representative body. As a result, negative stereotypes and societal scapegoating of Aborigines and Asians gained momentum and a distinct public legitimacy. Hanson variously spoke of Aborigines as lazy, undeserving, as the instigators of crime, and as receiving lenient court sentences, and emphasised their lack of hygiene as well as their 'savagery' through the

imputation of cannibalism.¹⁰ The previously extant anti-racist discourse was restricted in a context in which Mabo, Wik, and the Stolen Generation inquiry, following from the Bicentennial protests, the Royal Commission into Black Deaths in Custody, and the emergence of reconciliation, had ensured that “for the first time in Australian public history Aboriginal issues ha[d] become core issues for the future of Australian society” (Jakubowicz 193-94).

In this newly-defined public space of anti-censorship and personal freedom, Pauline Hanson’s range of criticisms of Aboriginal welfare, land rights, and multiculturalism in the period from her election up until May 1997, and most notably the September 10 maiden speech, were not the subject of criticism by the Prime Minister or the Federal government. This was not just a refusal to label Hanson a racist or accuse her of racism, but a refusal on Howard’s part to criticise or engage with Hanson at all regarding the substance of her sustained diatribe, passed off in much media reporting as a ‘debate,’ which inarguably fuelled anti-Asian/Aboriginal sentiment.¹¹ This increase was repeated from the ‘Great Immigration Debate’ of 1984, when anti-Asian sentiment increased in public opinion polls *after* Geoffrey Blainey had brought the issue to national attention (Goot 55). Such an increase in racial incidents suggests that these ‘race debates’ are a forum for the development of inchoate or latent racial tensions. Rather than debate Hanson’s ideas, Howard consistently refused even to refer to Hanson by name during discussions of heightened prejudice in the community – in a lengthy (twenty-six page transcript) interview with John Laws which focussed entirely on Hanson’s popularity, Howard barely referred to Hanson at all, and then only as “she” twice, and once as “the person.” The ‘free speech’ defence that all ideas “are presumptively valuable in a democracy because the publicity given to them will produce the debate essential to that democracy” (Fraser 163) is not valid, because the Howard Government refused to enter into a dialogue on race and discouraged others, including some of its own members,¹² from doing so: *there was no*

¹⁰ See for example “The Hanson Phenomenon” or the anonymously written *The Truth*.

¹¹ See Curtis, “Racism: big leap in Asian complaints,” and Lamont and Roberts, “Hanson forms a party as racism complaints soar.”

¹² On 2 October 1996 Howard distanced himself from comments National Party leader Tim Fischer had made about the damage Hanson was doing in Asia, and on the day that Immigration Minister Phillip Ruddock wrote of the benefit of immigration to the nation, Howard (in the Laws interview) gave credence to the view that immigrants, especially those with poor “language skills,” adversely affected employment

debate.

For those encouraging or participating in the negative assessments of indigenous issues and Asian immigration, the detrimental effect of such speech, which held Asians responsible for a threat to Australia's 'way of life,' and blamed Aborigines for the lasting effects of white colonisation, had to be either disregarded or denied. To this end the effect of Hanson's 'race speech' remained unacknowledged until Howard finally rejected the One Nation philosophy after the Liberal Party's disastrous 1998 Queensland election, noting that "For the first time, I've actually heard over the last couple of weeks people who've lived in this country for a very long time of Asian decent, say 'Gee, for the first time I feel a little bit unwelcome'" (qtd. in Henderson, "Harradine ups ante" 2). This admission was made in the context of Howard preferencing One Nation last on his how to vote card, with electoral strategy determining Howard's response to Hanson's effectiveness. Importantly, this acknowledgment was couched in terms of personal experience, rather than the statistics from the Human Right and Equal Opportunities Commission that showed significant increases in racial vilification up to 18 months previous. A tacit admission of the effect of Hansonite speech had occurred earlier with the establishment of a task force to combat the damage in Asia,¹³ but as Lisa Hill points out, this concern with the trade impact was not matched by any such measure on the domestic front (12). The willingness to ignore or deny such damage within Australia sets the paradigm for the discussion of race issues in the public sphere, with the importance of the 'consultation' on race meaning that it proceeded at the expense of the rights of those who were the racially identifiable objects of this discussion – Asian and Aboriginal people.

There were, however, some limits placed on the acceptance of Hanson's right to speak in the public sphere. The fact that Howard's longstanding principle of not rebutting any of Pauline Hanson's claims was forgotten when polls warned the Prime Minister of Hanson's potential to become a genuine electoral threat in April-May 1997 suggests not an unqualified acceptance of the expression of 'free speech,' but the Prime Minister's support for many of Hanson's ideas

rates.

¹³ For a sample of the coverage Hanson's views received in Asia, and some of the perceptions of damage done to Australia's relationship with Asian nations, see Hill, "Pauline Hanson, Free Speech and

up to the point of political cost: "I certainly believe in her right to say what she said. I thought some of the things she said were an accurate reflection of what people feel. I think she said, as I have said, that there were many times under the previous government where people felt intimidated out of saying what they really believed" (qtd. in Ramsey, "Hanson and the Question of Blame" 45). That this statement was made on 30 September, eight days after the 'free speech' argument was put, and in an interview with Alan Jones, confirms the message which Howard was attempting to send to elements of the electorate. Underlying the alignment with Hanson's views is a requirement that racism should be accommodated in order to prevent more extreme manifestations of it, an appeasement that was persistently deployed as the rationale for having the 'race debate.' Howard overtly signalled some elements of the considerable ideological agreement between Hanson and the Coalition government in his long period of 'non-response' to Hanson's maiden speech with cuts to Abstudy, a reduction of the independence of ATSIC, the reduction of foreign aid, migrant welfare and immigration, and a forty percent cut in funding for the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission (Steketee, "Coalition's quiet Hansonism" 6).

The coded rather than literal interpretation of 'free speech' which Howard's willingness to tolerate Hanson's racist sentiment was based on was also soon revealed: within two weeks of his "pall of censorship" comments, the Federal Government confirmed a High Court move in the Theophanous case which, if successful, would have limited the 'free speech' available to those criticising politicians. This contradicts Howard's representation of his "pall of censorship" comments as a Voltairean, value-neutral defence of 'free speech.' Similarly, later in November, Holocaust-revisionist historian David Irving's entry visa to Australia was rejected in an admission of the harmful effects of his views: this was a fresh attempt to enter the country, one sparked by Howard's September comments on the renewal of 'free speech' in Australia. Howard characterised Irving as "a nutter and a crackpot," terms notable for their avoidance of any ascription of racism or Nazi-sympathies.

At a later date, Howard also found it necessary to censor the speech of one of his own

Coalition members. In May 1997, Liberal Senator Ross Lightfoot entered the Senate with a denunciation of Aborigines as a racial group: “in their native state, Aborigines are the bottom colour of the civilisation spectrum” (qtd. in Seccombe, “New Senator’s rude remarks” 4). Three weeks earlier, in response to Lightfoot making similar remarks in the *Financial Review*, Howard had been approached for comment and failed to repudiate the view (Seccombe, “Kookaburra” 34). Yet at a time when the Federal Government was negotiating its failure to respond to the Stolen Generation inquiry, and Howard was under scrutiny for his provocative appearance at the Reconciliation Convention when he berated Aborigines for criticism of his ‘Ten point plan’ on Wik, the Prime Minister forced a hasty ‘correction’ from Senator Lightfoot over the remarks. Lightfoot’s comments are striking because they correspond to a traditional definition of racism: Howard’s failure to condemn Lightfoot at the first opportunity, and his tolerance of the vilification carried out by Hanson, demonstrates that it is only when the language of the extreme right strays into explicit racism, and when that racism threatens to be electorally damaging, that the Prime Minister has felt compelled to reject it. Otherwise, the defence of a newly discovered ‘free speech’ has taken precedence.

This privileging of the beneficial effects of ‘free speech’ over the potential harm of ‘race speech’ was (perhaps necessarily) underwritten by the denial of the presence of racism in Australian society. In April 1997, after a year of Hanson’s racial scapegoating and vilification, and the formation of her One Nation party, Howard was asked if the Member for Oxley was racist, but still wished to avoid using that term – “I wouldn’t use that expression, no. I think the expression ‘racist’ is used altogether too freely in this country” (qtd. in Riggert 12). Seven months after he had claimed the removal of the “pall of censorship,” Howard remained dissatisfied with the prevalence of accusations of racism, suggesting that for him, accusations of racism are intrinsically inappropriate in the Australian context.

In support of this belief, Howard and others have consistently maintained that those attracted to Hanson’s policies are not racist. In the October 24 1996 interview conducted by John Laws, the Prime Minister established his disapproval of “insensitive” remarks, such as the description of interracial children as “mongrels” by Peter Davis, Mayor of Port Lincoln in South Australia,

but maintained that, overwhelmingly, Australians were not “ratbags or bigots”: his choices of paradigm were stretched as he avoided using the term racist. In this interview the Prime Minister spoke repeatedly of the “understanding” he had of those who supported Pauline Hanson, a vital qualification that also appeared in his long-awaited rebuttal of Hanson in May 1997. This response to Hanson’s views emphasised Hanson’s specific “wrong” actions, but did not address what her many pronouncements are characteristic of – racism. Howard said: “She is wrong when she suggests that Aborigines are not disadvantaged. She is wrong when she says that Australia is being swamped by Asians. She is wrong to seek scapegoats for society’s problems” (qtd. in Willox 1). Criticism on the basis of specific and incorrect ‘facts’ crucially avoids an implication of racism, as the ascription of racist to an individual applies not just to individual action, “but presupposes a more enduring characteristic of people, and is therefore a judgement that is particularly face-threatening” (van Dijk 90).

While by this stage the benefits of the Coalition’s alignment to Hanson had begun to diminish, with polls showing increasing support for the One Nation party, the general view of the Hanson supporter as worthy citizen, defined by membership of the ‘mainstream’ and attendance at ‘town hall’ style meetings, was such a privileged construct that Howard was guarded against alienating t/his constituency. While criticising those Hanson supporters who backed the right to own illegal firearms in her book *The Truth*,¹⁴ Howard made a distinction between Hanson, and her supporters, and spoke of his comprehension of their intolerance: “I know why some Australians have stopped to listen to the member for Oxley. I say to them, however, she has no answer to your problems. The Hanson cure would be worse than the disease” (qtd. in Willox 1). This choice of a “disease” metaphor, where possible readings of the “disease” include general societal disquiet, the ‘silencing’ effected by the dominance of ‘politically correct’ attitudes to race issues, or the inequality of Aboriginal welfare, is significant given the propensity for native title to be characterised by Hanson as “cancer” (“Native title claims”).

¹⁴ The Prime Minister was most verbally and physically animated (see “Hanson versus Howard”) when decrying support for illegal firearms: “Why has she not distanced herself from supporters who have made irresponsible calls for the legislation of the type of weapon that Martin Bryant used to murder 35 Australians?” (qtd. in Willox 1). Hanson had denied responsibility for this section of the book, and the issue was certainly not the main one that she had traded on since her election in March 1996.

Howard's willingness to remain aligned to Hanson's supporters has endured; widely characterised as 'talking in code,' many of his statements on Hanson have followed a pattern of non-specific but suggestive rhetoric, which has the capacity to appeal to the extremists among Hanson supporters without alienating more tolerant elements of the community. As the 1998 Queensland election campaign began, Howard launched an explicit attempt to attract Hanson supporters – "We will be directing a specific message to One Nation supporters pointing out that the positive things that they want and believe in we can deliver more effectively than anybody else without the baggage of the negatives that she brings" (qtd. in Johnstone and Franklin 1). Despite the strength of Howard's personal attack on Hanson during the Queensland election campaign, the inability to 'brand' Hanson a racist remained in evidence, as did the often-expressed belief that Hanson supporters were "ordinary decent Australians" (Howard, Interview with Fran Kelly). Hanson's sustained (and, for the Coalition, electorally damaging) popularity meant that by this stage she had taken her 'free speech' too far, beyond the needs of the Coalition government, but despite her success in mobilising racial sentiment Howard's belief in the 'decency' of her supporters prevailed.

Howard's focus on the importance of the need and the right of 'all' Australians to speak out, specifically on race, was defined by its opposition to Labor's anti-racist objectives. The perceived 'naturalness' of defending one's way of life means that it is not those who defend white Australian culture, but their accusers, those who identify this racism – or in Mackay's words treat with 'hostility' and provoke 'horror' – who become the focus of public discussion on race. In a clear reminder of Australia's history of racist nationalism, vigorous debate on race became linked to the interests of the 'mainstream Australian.' In this way the pre-1996 political/media discursive orthodoxy on race, which generally censured explicit racism, was interrogated through the increased salience of narratives of blame directed at Aborigines, immigrants and the Left. In comparison to Howard's silence on Hanson's ideas, a general opprobrium was attached to those who challenged Hanson's attempt to blame minority groups for economic hardship. Through the Prime Minister's comments on the conduct of public discussion on race, he exhibited a continued willingness to align himself with the values and

language of the hard-line right, whose members include Pauline Hanson and the angry white males of talkback radio. It is clear that Howard subscribed to the view that the unworthy beneficiaries of a denial of 'free speech' had been Aborigines, Asians, and other minority groups, who had been allowed to exercise a disproportionate influence in Australian public life.

Chapter 2: The Search for Victims

Since official, institutional racism was discredited through the abolition of the 'White Australia Policy' in 1973, and racial discrimination was made illegal by the 1975 Racial Discrimination Act, expressions of belief in a racial hierarchy or biological superiority over Aborigines and non-white immigrants have lost much of their public legitimacy. Explicit public racism has predominantly been forced underground – attempts to denigrate or exclude on a racial basis are now usually based on “discourses which resort to all manner of rhetorical devices to construct a narrative of special pleading ... and a litany of real or imagined grievance” (Cohen 93). This sense of grievance was a feature of the conservative discourse that accompanied the election of the 1996 Federal Government. As an extension of the ostensible gag on 'free speech,' this grievance was worked into a mythology of victimisation, created and sustained by rhetorical concepts that gained considerable currency in the public/political sphere. Pauline Hanson's scapegoating of Aborigines and Asians was given freedom in this context, able to be defended on the grounds of her membership of the 'mainstream' and validated in terms of a rejection of 'political correctness.' Hanson's appeal to the lost imagined unity and racial homogeneity of Australia's 1950s cultural heritage is an authorising device for her participation in political discourse: her frequently-expressed fear of the level of Asian immigration reiterates the imperatives of the White Australia Policy. The Coalition's 1996 electoral slogan 'For All of Us,' the professed need to privilege the 'mainstream,' and the struggle against 'political correctness' all to some extent bespeak the white majority grouping's loss of its previous position of all but unchallenged dominance.

Within these concepts is an attack on the public/political presence and rights of different racial groups and other 'minorities'; each is designed or applied to mobilise sentiment on a racially specific basis. This imperative saw a willingness from the Howard Federal Government to

allow 'race speech' to dominate the public sphere, at a time when the economic rationalism of the Keating government that had been rejected by the electorate was being expanded and moved further right through the Coalition's policies. This intention was revealed through one of the Coalition's earliest priorities upon election, a move on the funding and independence of ATSIC in early April 1996 which gained sustained media attention: ATSIC accountability was the subject of the Coalition Government's first cabinet meeting, as well as John Howard's first Canberra press conference (Bachelard 34). Led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs Minister John Herron, the Coalition government's early confrontations with ATSIC were revealing of the assimilationist impulse that guided its approach to indigenous policy issues. Aboriginal issues were removed to the outer ministry to be administered by a junior, inexperienced (even as a shadow) minister, a position that contrasted with the immediate (negative) media profile gained by ATSIC 'rorts' under the Coalition.

The prominence of such issues fulfilled the Coalition election promises, made in a campaign that was recognised as introducing US-style wedge politics to Australia. Wedge politics, which encourage a supposedly silenced or neglected majority to identify itself in opposition to special interest groups, proved to be most persistently and powerfully resonant on the issue of race. As then Liberal Party Federal Director Andrew Robb explained it, "'For all of us' was designed to reach people who legitimately felt betrayed. What we were saying was that in governing, we would not just consider the well being of a select few, but we would consider the broad national interest. We would govern not just for some, but *for all of us*" (37). This strategy initiated the exclusion of minority groups from the national identity as it was envisioned by John Howard and the Coalition, and ensured that in the post-election 'race debate,' 'blackness' and 'Asianness' were increasingly disarticulated from 'Australianess.' The Coalition's election slogan, "For All of Us," despite its apparent inclusivity, meant, as Mary Kalantzis argues, "little more than redressing the special favours that had been bestowed on 'them'" ("The Mainstream" 44).

This view tapped into a dominant theme in conservative thinking – a fear that minority left-wing interest groups, frequently characterised as 'special interests' or as 'industries,' had

monopolised the public agenda in Australia to the detriment of the 'mainstream.' Aboriginal issues and 'multiculturalism,' a word (as with racism) that Howard refused to say, are part of these 'special interests,' and are therefore seen as deserving a lower priority than the majority. Aborigines and Asians, linked by racial difference from the majority, were held responsible for the hardships created by Labor's failed economic policies, though in different ways – broadly, Aborigines for being 'undeserving,' and Asians for being too conscientious, for 'stealing' jobs or university places. In this context, a contradiction within the special pleading of the majority is apparent – while Aborigines' rights, derived from their prior status as the indigenous Australians, are discredited through the mobilisation of class disapproval, the same priority of Australian birth *rite* is used to exclude 'Asians,' despite the fact that they may work harder (or perhaps because of it).

While the post-election scapegoating confirmed the racial implications of the slogan 'For All of Us,' the identification of racism in this strategy by Noel Pearson and others was used by the Coalition government to fulfil their own prophecies of the dominance of anti-racism and the presence of McCarthyism. Racism was ascribed to Howard early in October 1996, by NSW Labor general secretary John della Bosca, who stated that the Prime Minister and the Liberal Party had benefited from a racist election campaign (Chan and Nason 4). In response, Howard condemned the use of the word 'racist,' and, as he had two weeks previously in the September 22 'free speech' argument, tied its use to McCarthyism. Howard's defence situated della Bosca's charge of racism as being an action that was not connected to the interests of the majority: "They were the desperate smears of a man and a party who have nothing relevant to say about the bread-and-butter issues of concern to mainstream Australia" (qtd. in Chan and Nason 4). For this insistently invoked 'mainstream Australia' of Howard and Pauline Hanson, exclusion is as much a priority as inclusion.

The term 'mainstream Australia' revives Bob Menzies' 'forgotten people,' the explicit alignment to the middle class, but uses racial and cultural difference, as well as opposition to 'politically correct' 'elites,'¹ rather than communism/socialism as a delimiting opposite. The

¹ This 'elite' status has variously been attributed to Labor, the 'chattering classes' of high culture and academia, and, during the docks dispute, wharfies. It also taps into the extreme right-wing rhetoric that

'mainstream' is a privileging of Australia's 1950s symbols of racial and cultural homogeneity: Menzies, nuclear families, and an unproblematic White Australia Policy. This appeal to the cultural authority of the collective origins of 'mainstream Australia' was invoked in a bid to revitalise a mythology of the monoculture, whose dominance was under challenge from emergent national narratives of multiculturalism and reconciliation. In his November 1996 Menzies lecture, Howard viewed his 'mainstream' as a majority grouping, a potential long-term power base like 'the forgotten people':

Liberalism now has an opportunity, unparalleled for almost fifty years, to consolidate a new coalition of support among the broad cross-section of the Australian people. It will only prove enduring if Liberalism continues to relate its fundamental values and principles to the concerns and aspirations of the mainstream, rather than the narrower agendas of elites and special interests. ("Liberal Tradition" 12)

The clash between traditional liberalism and the New Right in this conservative appraisal of the diverse Australian community is apparent: Howard firstly emphasises the need to include a "broad cross-section" of Australians, then outlines the principle by which some Australians need to be excluded. Howard also anachronistically claimed in this lecture that Menzies had catered for "the great mainstream of Australian society" (4) and "the men and women of the great Australian mainstream who felt excluded" (11). The value that Howard places on this conservative succession can be seen in the place he accords his parents: "Both my parents were conservatives – quintessential examples of Menzies' 'forgotten people'" (qtd. in Mackay, "Howard on Howard" 3).

While Menzies' use of 'the forgotten people' was limited (Brett, "Politics of Grievance" 12), Howard's 'mainstream' has been frequently and persistently used as a motivating force for varied policies and legislation, especially with regard to the Coalition's positioning in the debate which accompanied the need for a hard-line legislative resolution to the High Court's Wik decision. One of the chief distinguishing features of Howard's 'mainstream' as he establishes it is its non-racist character – when rejecting Hanson's ideas in May 1997, Howard claimed that

pervades Pauline Hanson's *The Truth*.

her views were incompatible with the “decent conservative mainstream” (qtd. in Willox 2).² The significance of the privileging of the ‘mainstream’ rests with the claim to be personally representative of the majority and the authority that this brings. The term ‘mainstream’ therefore shares with ‘For All of Us’ an emphasis on the importance of the majority’s needs and justification of the reduction of ‘special interest’ group rights.

As with Howard, Hanson’s co-opting of the imagined constituency of the ‘mainstream’ allowed her an explicitly representative authority: “everything I have said is relevant to my electorate of Oxley, which is typical of mainstream Australia” (Maiden Speech 3863). For Hanson, the ‘mainstream’ is a euphemism for a single culture requiring racial unity to survive: “abolishing the policy of multiculturalism will save billions of dollars and allow those from ethnic backgrounds to join mainstream Australia, paving the way to a strong, united country” (Maiden Speech 3862). It is the white Australian Anglo-Celtic culture which is presented as *superior* here – the privileging of this identity category ensured that Pauline Hanson was able to capitalise on an Australian whiteness re-imposed as a sole cultural authority.

The justification for this favouring of the ‘mainstream’ majority grouping was primarily in terms of a reaction to ‘political correctness’ – the imposition of the will of unrepresentative minorities and/or radical elites – and the ‘silencing’ this had produced in specific areas of public debate. Within the pantheon of (conservative) rhetorical devices for claiming authority, the term ‘mainstream’ can be seen to have replaced the much less successful ‘silent majority.’ A crucial shift has therefore occurred from an appeal to those unwilling or too apathetic to speak out, to those who have been unable to do so – the *silenced* majority. The scapegoating of Aborigines and Asians for Labor’s failed economic policies was therefore legitimised in terms of opposition to the apparent oppressiveness of ‘political correctness.’ One of the narrower understandings of this term, the replacing of offensive or exclusive terms with a more inclusive vocabulary, was also present in the ‘race debate.’ Hanson (29 May 1996) and Howard (2 May 1997) both expressed the belief that the various mechanisms of Aboriginal

² At times, though, the term is generalised to the point of absurdity. When speaking after the death of Princess Diana, Howard claimed that she was being mourned by the “mainstream” of the British community and the “mainstream of our society” (qtd. in Phillips 161, from *Hansard* 1 Sep. 1997).

welfare and gestures towards self-government such as ATSIC amounted to an “Aboriginal industry.” For Mick Dodson, the use of this term “legitimises perceptions that Australians, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, who work with energy and devotion to build a decent life for our people are, in some imprecise way, leeches on the public purse” (qtd. in Cunneen, “Introduction” 7). “Aboriginal industry” does not carry any imputation of diligence, but instead names (and mocks) what is represented as an unnecessary perpetuation of equity provision; the term represents an obvious downranking or debasing (Watson 34) of the terms available for discussion of Aboriginal affairs. Howard’s preparedness to use the phrase when on the right-wing talkback radio circuit – “I want to get the record straight: any suggestion that we have perpetuated the Aboriginal industry is wrong” (Howard, Interview with Alan Jones) – demonstrates an alignment with the extreme right’s view of Aboriginal issues. In such contexts, the willingness to use this kind of term is seen as a virtue, a rejection of the ‘politically correct’ terminology which has prevented the ‘truth’ about Aboriginal affairs being told.

Yet when Queensland National Party President Ken Crooke attributed the Coalition’s 1996 Federal election victory to a rejection of the “thought police”³ (qtd. in Franklin and Stark 1), and other powerful political figures, including Prime Minister Howard, similarly sought to claim victimisation from ‘political correctness,’ a much more extensive, even conspiratorial threat to freedom/‘free speech’ is alleged. When Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs Minister John Herron was under concerted attack over claims of mismanagement of his portfolio, Howard offered the following defence:

The thought police ... have been hovering around him. ... I almost have the view that unless one embraces the politically correct view of Aboriginal affairs, one is condemned to inevitable media criticism. (qtd. in Grattan A21)

In this way, the concept of ‘political correctness’ was successfully constructed in the public/political sphere as oppressive, dominating, media-supported and imposed by the

³ As Henry Reynolds points out, for Crooke and Bob Katter (who used similar terminology pre-election) to make such claims must be measured against their status as representatives of the Queensland National Party, which imposed draconian measures limiting free speech in the 1970s (“Racist gibe or free speech”

departed Labor government, and, implicitly, as causing the perpetuation of falsities. Despite the sweeping victory of the Coalition in the 1996 election, Howard's comment implicitly asserts that this set of views enforced by the media, Labor, the intelligentsia and 'special interest groups' retained its capacity to silence alternatives – the existence of 'political correctness' is being posited in the same unreflective manner that the comment meant to deride. As Mark Davis establishes in *Gangland*, opposition to 'political correctness,' taken from its United States context where it was widely applied in the scholarship of right-wing think tanks, had long been a badge of honour among many Australian media commentators and public figures, with the chief proponents of 'pc' being established as Labor, feminists, or (elements of) the universities (60-71). This was therefore an "idea ready shaped to express a powerful political Manicheanism," which "opened the way for a radical dualism, contrasting freedom and 'thought control,' patriotism and self loathing" (Lynch 34). It was with the election of the Coalition government in 1996 that 'political correctness' became a central feature of party political discourse, as opposition to the concept was used to justify the deployment of policies (and language) that had, allegedly, been suppressed.

Like Howard, the white middle-class leader of a major political party, Pauline Hanson also claimed victimisation from the effects of 'political correctness.' Both consistently portrayed themselves as authentic Australians, battling against those discordant voices that came to be characterised as 'unAustralian.' Yet despite her continual protest at "the inequity that has grown from years of political correctness, where we have not been able to speak our mind" ("Launch of One Nation"), before and since her election Hanson was frequently able to speak out on issues in a manner which challenged previously accepted ideas. The January 6 letter to the *Queensland Times*, and the comments to the *Courier-Mail* on February 14 which prompted her disendorsement, were followed by ongoing commentary on the state of Aboriginal welfare and Asian immigration, including remarks on who she would (not) represent (March 3 1996), the need to compare the damage done by white invasion with black-to-black savagery (April 10 1996), the uselessness of

reconciliation with Aborigines (May 29 1996), and the germinal parliamentary maiden speech (September 10 1996). Hanson's desire to challenge existing political ideas and protocols regarding race issues was therefore consistently and consciously manifested. Her speaking position and profile as an elected representative were not available to all – an example of this emerged after she had addressed the National Party branch of Bribie Island in June 1997. Under pressure to provide equal access for an Aboriginal or Chinese speaker, National Party organiser Dorothy Parr first consented, but later withdrew the offer (Abbott, "No equal billing" 3).

While 'political correctness' was mobilised as pejorative shorthand for a range of predominantly left-wing views and language, Howard's defence of Senator Herron shared with Hanson the element of 'political correctness' which most frequently required challenge: an apparent restriction on what could publicly be said on racial issues. Recent Aboriginal policy initiatives such as the formation of ATSIC, the promotion of reconciliation, and Labor's legislative support of native title were all articulated to 'political correctness' and criticised on this basis, rather than being evaluated against any coherent alternative arguments. Within this context, Hanson is able to reject the view that disadvantaged Aboriginal communities are a product of historical white racism and are therefore white society's responsibility, because such a view is only held by those who "promote political correctness" (Maiden Speech 3860).

This proposition by opponents of 'political correctness' – that a silencing of comments on governmental policies on Aboriginal issues and multiculturalism has occurred – is difficult to support. If Ross Chambers' definition of the deprivation of the power of speech can be used – "what is usually meant by the phrase is exclusion from the powerful discursive positions of 'preexisting,' socially derived authority (the media, including print; the professions, including in particular the profession of politics)" (4) – then to claim that conservative politics (which is usually extended to white society in general) has been deprived of the space to contribute to debate on these issues is unsustainable, whether measured by media ownership/access or parliamentary representation. Rather than

supporting the claim that white Australia has been marginalised or discriminated against in any way, the evidence would instead suggest that “the ‘mainstream’ has lost its monopoly on being Australian” (Dale 12), and, through Pauline Hanson’s appeal to the collective origins of white Australia, has stridently attempted to reclaim it.

A short look at the recent political history of race issues is revealing in terms of what it indicates about the level of consensus among conservatives. Howard’s 1980s focus on national ‘homogeneity’ was not only criticised by Labor, but by other high-profile Liberals including New South Wales Premier Nick Greiner, Victorian Opposition Leader Jeff Kennett and former Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser (Castles 172); senior Liberals, including immigration minister of the 1996 government, Phillip Ruddock, also crossed the floor when Howard’s ‘One Australia’ policies were debated in parliament. While there had been a bipartisan approach to immigration since John Howard’s inflammatory 1988 comments on Asian immigration, conservative opposition to increased Aboriginal rights in the late 1980s and 1990s was consistently voiced.

The negotiation of Aboriginal land rights in the public sphere was re-ignited in 1993 by the Keating Labor Government’s legislative resolution to the High Court’s Mabo decision; this followed the struggle over national narratives of ‘settlement’ sparked by the clash of celebration and protest during the 1988 Bicentennial. Labor’s 1993 Native Title Act was fiercely and openly contested by then Opposition Leader John Hewson, Howard, State Premiers and mining interests. Political success in these issues was shared – while the attempt to reduce Asian immigration was ‘lost’ in that it was not adopted as policy by any of the major political parties, and in fact in Howard’s case was widely seen as contributing to his removal as Opposition Leader, the Hawke Labor government’s efforts in the 1980s to implement a national land rights policy were abandoned because of the extent of opposition.⁴ To claim the dominance of a Labor-led ‘political correctness’ therefore ignores conservative successes, as well as the past unpopularity of Howard’s Asian immigration stand within even Coalition ranks.⁵

⁴ See Libby, *Hawke’s Law*, and Stokes, “Special Interests,” for accounts of this episode.

⁵ Geoffrey Blainey had employed a similar polarising strategy with many of his arguments in the ‘Great

It is just as difficult to sustain the argument about the silencing of conservatives in the media, the other 'powerful discursive position' that Chambers identifies, where conservative thought has had a widespread presence. This was apparent previous to the election of the Howard government – in 1995 conservative commentator Gerard Henderson claimed that "the non-left have never had a better run in the mainstream media" ("Unlike Hunted Wu" A11). While the four 'race' candidates of the 1996 election were criticised for their election remarks, they received immense publicity. For Bob Burgess and Hanson, and before them, Bob Katter and Graeme Campbell, this publicity delivered them from probable political obscurity to national prominence. Race-related commentary has also provided vital subject matter for right-leaning talkback radio programs for many years.⁶ For the wider public, involvement in these discussions permits public affirmations of prejudice to be received positively; if desired the illegitimacy of explicit racism can be masked by anonymity.

Such public comments draw on a 'common sense' discourse of anti-Aboriginal rights/welfare, prominent since the initial extension of welfare benefits to the Aboriginal population in the late 1950s and 1960s. The strength of this discourse, especially at moments of crisis in the white dominance such as the land rights movement of the 1980s or native title in the 1990s – *timely* mobilisations of racism – is an expression of dissatisfaction with the growing influence of pro-Aborigine and anti-racist ideals in Australian society. While assertions of explicit racism based on notions of racial hierarchy and biological determinism have lost public acceptability and certainly official approval in an era of anti-discrimination, "the relativising of knowledge to the realm of private meanings drawn from experience remains a powerful source of legitimation" (Morris, "Racism" 68). This accounts for the popularity of race issues in the forum of talkback radio, which has sustained the careers of many right-wing commentators in their rejection of the increased recognition of Aboriginal rights or mourning of White Australia.

Immigration Debate' of 1984, consistently blaming Labor for Asian immigration and multiculturalism, ignoring the fact that Liberal Prime Minister Fraser and conservative State Premiers had also embraced these concepts (Brown 71-74).

⁶ The most renowned among many exponents of 'race issues' on talkback radio include Ron Casey, John Laws, Alan Jones, Stan Zemanek and Howard Sattler.

Aided by Howard's endorsement of her 'free speech,' Hanson's status as an elected representative (who is 'not a politician') has granted public legitimacy to her constant racial vilification – a denigration of Aborigines and Asians valorised as the public expression of widely-held private beliefs and experiences. The stereotypes that dominate Hanson's attitudes, including claims that Aborigines are lazy, dirty, tend to criminality and are predominantly undeserving, are derived from widely discredited concepts of the inherent characteristics of 'race.' In this way she assumed the public mantle of private racism, accounting for McKenzie Wark's suspicion that "the anonymous radio talkback caller finally found a face and a full name" (260).⁷ As Cohen has written of the British situation, "the continual citation of 'first hand' experience conveys an implicit message that it is [the] encounter with black people" by means of "eye- and ear-witness accounts" (89), not previous racisms, that has led to the development of racist views. Discrimination is in this way authorised by the "occlusion of the preconstruction or working-up of difference" (Bhabha, "The Other Question" 79), so that recognition of the 'inferiority' of Aborigines and Asians in negative stereotypes is conceived of as spontaneous, "primary cognition" (Bhabha, "The Other Question" 80). The visibility of racial difference is therefore necessary to the knowledge production required of discrimination (Bhabha, "The Other Question" 78). Aborigines and Asians are in this way 'needed' for the generation of discrimination from first-hand experience or for the received knowledge of talkback radio to flourish.

It is Hanson's status as representative of the ordinary person, able to publicly express the racism (though it is not acknowledged as such) drawn from personal experience, that is her most fundamental strategy of self-authorisation. Her willingness to speak against so-called dominant political beliefs in public discourse has carried with it a widespread sympathy and many laudatory evaluations – many of those who say that while they may not agree with 'everything the Member of Oxley says,' value her individual courage in speaking out. Hanson, One Nation Party members and her supporters easily equate Hanson's image of political freedom and innocence, ensured by her novitiate status in the political sphere and expulsion

⁷ John Howard's fondness for appearing on talkback radio demonstrates the equivalent audiences that he and Hanson are speaking to.

from the Liberal Party, to genuineness and authenticity. This sincerity and authenticity cement the perceived 'ordinariness' of Hanson, a self-proclaimed non-politician who has a "view on issues based on common sense and my experience as a mother of four children, a sole parent and a businesswoman running a fish and chip shop" (Maiden Speech 3860). Without the restriction of political party orthodoxy, Hanson's views are unarguably her own – it is this very ordinary political sincerity that helps produce Hanson's messianic value (Nile 1).

Apart from this representation as ordinary, it is difficult to justify the explanation that Hanson's popularity stems from the distance of the ordinary people from the 'elites' or the establishment. There is certainly little ideological disparity on social issues between Hanson and the existing political right. Mark Davis establishes the extent to which right-wing intellectuals have espoused a more complex and refined version of Hanson's ideas, a point acknowledged by Robert Manne after initial denial: "Manne has since conceded that many members of the 'conservative intelligentsia' would find 'their own ideas – on the new class, political correctness, Mabo, multiculturalism, Asian migration, the High Court – absorbed, simplified, systematised and radicalised' in Hanson's rhetoric" (Davis 73, quoting from Manne 22). Hanson contrasts the previous public manifestations of 'race speech' of John Howard and Geoffrey Blainey in her ordinariness and willingness to personally affirm her race-oriented beliefs – while they also claimed to speak on behalf of public opinion, the two men did so in a manner which distanced themselves from the racial sentiment they described.

Like Blainey, who in 1984 specified that "The poorer people in the cities are the real sufferers, and see themselves as such, in the face of increasing Asian immigration" ("Asianisation of Australia" 11), Howard (in 1988) was only prepared to identify racial sentiment in others – "I think there are some in the community who are concerned that the pace of change has been too great" (qtd. in Castles 171).⁸ Both Howard and Blainey were

⁸ As with Hanson's comments about the danger of being swamped by Asians, these fears of Asian invasion demonstrate that white Australia is a vulnerable victim too – it is not only Aborigines whose existence has been/is threatened by invasion.

careful to specify that *personally* they did not believe there were too many Asians in Australia.

Therefore, while all three deny personal racism, Hanson's class representation enables her to fully capitalise on the claim to represent ordinary Australians. This is not to downplay the extent of upper class/corporate racism, or to stereotype the racism of the working/lower-middle class, but to argue that as an authentic representation of the "battler,"⁹ Hanson offers a convenient focus for both. In the valorised image of the 'ordinary Australian' which has dominated political rhetoric as a reaction to the oft-claimed elitism or arrogance of the Keating years, Howard has persistently portrayed himself as standing for the interests of ordinary people. But despite the Prime Minister's image as 'Honest John' (a sobriquet which now almost always loses its original ironic value) and self-description as "an average Australian bloke" ("An Average Australian Bloke") who has suffered under 'political correctness,' it is Pauline Hanson who has offered a more effectively authenticated embodiment of a previously silenced 'ordinary' Australian, now able to speak out.¹⁰ Hanson's statements therefore constantly invoke the authority of authenticity and 'truth telling':

The few politicians who care enough to recognise the situation will not speak out, because the politically correct multiculturalists and sections of the media will call them names... In my own case, when I said what we all know to be the truth, the Liberal Party disendorsed me, and used me as an example to others of what will happen if you break ranks and speak the truth. ("Launch of One Nation")

If Hanson is able to plausibly accord her ideas 'truth' status in the public sphere, then negative public discussion of her concepts becomes invalid. Any opposition to Hanson's beliefs only provides 'evidence' of the victimisation of an ordinary Australian, a deployment of 'political correctness' rather than a legitimate expression of criticism.

⁹ Hanson is working class in background and demeanour: her property and business interests ally her with the self-made business person of the middle class, hence her membership of the Liberal Party rather than Labor.

¹⁰ There appears a loose equation between the claim to be an 'ordinary Australian' and being 'non-racist,' with racism clearly conceived of in a pathological sense. To view racism as a pathology repeats its logic in treating the offender as subhuman, and limits the recognition of racism in less systematic and less paradigmatic forms.

While there is a significant anti-establishment aspect to her appeal, Hanson's ideals are specifically grounded in her exclusion of Aborigines and Asians from significant roles in the Australian identity. Her sense of exclusion has generated a focus on disenfranchising those beneath her on the social scale, the less secure 'Australians,' more than those above. One of the founding moments of Hanson's 'persecution' in the media was the 'xenophobia/please explain' exchange with *60 Minutes*' Tracy Curro, a misguided attempt on the part of the journalist to delegitimise Hanson through demonstrating her lack of knowledge. Such distance from the 'elites' is now worn as a badge of honour by Hanson followers – in her appearance on *Today Tonight* on 21 May 1998, newly-appointed Queensland One Nation leader Heather Hill (now Senator-elect) was keen to establish that although she now knew what xenophobia was, she didn't at the time of the Hanson-Curro interview. While Hanson's own media appearances continue to highlight the sense of exclusion from the political/media establishment on which her appeal is based, a more telling intersection of power is revealed earlier in the germinal *60 Minutes* programme. Under the gaze of Hanson, Channel 9, and the local police, a teenage Aboriginal boy is arrested for swearing at Hanson, and forced by three officers into the back of a police car for the edification of the television viewer. "Thanks guys," Hanson laughs, as the boy is made aware of the limitations of acceptable speech. Hanson's promised rebirth for the Australian community is consistently predicated on removing the rights of those who resist the reassertion of 'mainstream' dominance in public/political space.

Within Hanson's attempts to overturn the very recent recognition of Aboriginal rights, rights granted on the basis of Aborigines' historical dispossession, the alleged 'silencing' of majority interests is equated to Australia's history of dispossession, destruction, and marginalisation of Aborigines. Therefore Hanson is able to legitimately occupy the category of 'white Australian' victim of "the politically correct multiculturalists," a position supported by claims of reverse racism and McCarthyism. Through ceding this 'advantage' to Aborigines, Hanson not only denies the reality of the actual conditions of black oppression (which she does frequently and with success), but claims those disadvantaged circumstances as her own, in order to justify racial discrimination. From this basis she claimed the need to "fight" for "the white community,

the immigrants, Italians, Greeks, whoever, it really doesn't matter – anyone apart from the Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders" (qtd. in Dore and Gunn 10).

The trading of places (Cohen 90) involved in Hanson's demonstration of the 'persecution' of the ordinary seeks to capitalise on the extra discursive and emotive power which speaking-as-victim grants. This strategy correctly identifies the authority of this speaking position and is a deployment by Hanson of what she is attacking – societal sympathy, and reparation for, 'victims.' As Curthoys points out, there is a powerful narrative of victimage present within white Australian popular culture ("Entangled histories" 121). This sympathy for the battler or underdog is a valorised position in Australian society – as employed by John Howard in his 1996 election pitch to Australia's 'battlers' – although historically it has been limited to those within the 'mainstream,' and has certainly excluded Aborigines. Hanson's status as 'single mother' is emblematic of this position: this potentially dangerous 'family' category for a politician of the extreme right is invoked only to reinforce Hanson's status as 'battler.'¹¹ This particular 'battler' remains ideologically sound through the hard work she has performed as a small business owner. Hanson therefore authorises her self through her status as the excluded, 'weak' underdog, courageously speaking out against 'political correctness,' in order to blame current social and economic ills on the even weaker: newly-arrived migrants, and historically dispossessed Aborigines.¹² Aborigines are therefore targeted because of their unworthy claims to victim status, signified by welfare dependency, and Hanson becomes representative of the 'true' victims. There is here an implicit opposition to the stereotypical single mother on welfare – if Hanson has "had her fair share of life's knocks" (Maiden Speech 3860) and doesn't require handouts, then they, like Aborigines, are unworthy victims.

The insistence that the ordinary, white people have been victimised has produced a concomitant rejection of the validity of Aboriginal policy issues, which become characterised as special, or privileged. These claims about the dominance of Aboriginal issues reflect the

¹¹ This contradiction emerged when One Nation Party Director David Oldfield brought considerable embarrassment to One Nation when he invoked the homophobic "family value" scare tactic that single parent families produce homosexual children.

¹² A fictional equivalent to Hanson can be seen in Bill Hunter's character in *Muriel's Wedding*. With the electoral slogan "Bill the Battler," Hunter's Bill Heaslop pursues his political career on the basis of an

strength of a previously taken-for-granted authority, especially the authority of rural identity, as well as a perpetual lower-middle-class angst. The need to fight for whites means fighting for an equality which reduces the current status of Aborigines, a position authorised by Australia's powerful myth of egalitarianism.¹³ Egalitarianism is a philosophy that enjoys a widespread diffusion in Australian society; traditionally this egalitarianism has been limited to white heterosexual males, and even within this group, may more accurately be described as an egalitarianism of manners.¹⁴ The capacity for this ideal of the ordinary or equal to have an oppressive, exclusive element was clearly recognised by the Coalition in its application of wedge politics at the 1996 election: "Focus groups commissioned by the Liberal Party before the election found economic insecurity coupled with resentment at news that land was being bought for Aboriginal people or ramps were being built for the disabled" (Sawer 74). Economic hardship therefore determines that 'special' privileges be pared back for the restoration of 'equality,' a logic that has driven the Howard government's attack on special interest groups, those outside of 'mainstream Australia.'

From the insistent privileging of the 'mainstream' that has accompanied the Howard government throughout its term, Howard's concept of democracy, like Hanson's, is one which not only insists on the rights of the majority at the expense of 'minority' groups, but actively works by mobilising sentiment against these groups. Hanson's consistent imputation that the interests of white Australia have become a minority concern in public debate combined with the cynicism directed at existing politicians and political agendas to grant her considerable authority in the political sphere. Her public popularity contributed to the legitimisation of the Howard government's post-election aim to redress the 'special favours' which 'rights'-based groups had, it was argued, received under Labor. Both Howard and Hanson appeared intent on a re-negotiation of cultural authenticity through an appeal to a specious 1950s-style unity that occludes difference. This emphasis was most apparent in the area of Aboriginal issues: the 'special' nature of measures designed to address past dispossession was rejected as an imposition, to the extent that any mention of Aboriginal issues came to demonstrates a

oppressive relationship with his family, those below him on the social scale who genuinely 'battle.'

¹³ See Chapter 4 for an examination of the deployment of this version of 'equality.'

¹⁴ See Hirst, "Egalitarianism."

'politically correct' dominance over the ordinary both in person and policy. The difference of Aborigines, which has granted them certain distinct rights derived from their historical dispossession, has generated a response from many conservatives which demonstrates the similarity or equality of Aborigines. This assertion depends most substantially on the discrediting of the historical scholarship that has recently focussed on the destructive nature of white Australia's relationship with the indigenous people of the land.

Chapter 3: Distancing the Past

The conservative appeal to the collective origins of the white Australian nation required a political re-evaluation of the history of white Australia's relationship with the indigenous population, a history that had gained increased relevance in the Australian narrative of nation. Through his continually voiced disapproval of the 'black armband view' of Australia's past, John Howard was a major contributor to the historical interpretations of the 'race debate.' In a similar way, Pauline Hanson's public statements on race have repeatedly focussed on the need for the restoration of historical 'balance' – in recognising black-to-black savagery (April 1996), in rejecting the concept of reconciliation (May 1996), and in expressing the need for the 'truth' to be told (April 1997). This desire for the re-imposition of the imperial discourse of settlement – couched in terms of the need for objective history – recalls Australia's past dependence on the power of the settler/coloniser to represent the other, a dependence most obvious in the construction of the national historical narrative. The settler's power to represent has been demonstrated in much of Australia's history and historiography, which until recently reflected little of the colonised's perspective. Both Hanson and Howard appeared intent on re-establishing whiteness as the exclusive foundation of the teleology of the Australian nation, in their attacks on the relevance of historical interpretations which foreground Aboriginal presence. The appearance of Aboriginal experience in the founding narratives of the Australian nation has again, for some conservatives, demonstrated the victimisation of white Australians. As used by Howard and Hanson, a newly self-authorising colonialist discourse has encouraged the return of an assimilationist impulse in the political sphere, through the dismissal of history from non-white perspectives as deployments of 'political correctness' or the propagation of 'black armband' views of history.

The 1996 'race debate' continued the recent heightened contestation of history in Australian

political discourse. As Prime Minister from 1991-96, Paul Keating had a significant personal involvement in attempts to re-define aspects of Australian history, especially in relation to Australia's move towards a republic, and in recognising white Australia's treatment of the indigenous populations of the country. In 1996 John Howard spoke of this previous government's partisan attempt to "re-write important parts of Australia's political history" ("Liberal Tradition" 2), and rejected Keating's description, borrowed from Manning Clark, of the historical role of conservatives as the "straighteners" of Australian life in comparison to Labor's status as the "enlargers" ("Liberal Tradition" 4).

As a response to Keating, Howard consistently performed a leading role in securing positive interpretations of conservative political history. In his address to the 1995 ACOSS Congress, Howard defended the Coalition's "proud record of achievement" ("Fair Australia" 7) in social policy, and declared that it was "a Liberal National government that ended the White Australia Policy" ("Fair Australia" 7); both Howard and shadow immigration minister Jim Short made repeated references to the Holt Government's abolition of 'White Australia' in the pre-election period (Brawley). The Opposition Leader also claimed credit for the "Liberal National government that sponsored the 1967 referendum which removed any presumption that the Constitution could discriminate against Aborigines" ("Fair Australia" 7).¹

Howard's election campaign was also significant for its gestures of reconciliation toward the ethnic vote, in an attempt to repair the damage done by his previous remarks over the threat that Asian immigration posed to Australia's social cohesion. The introduction of Asian immigration as an issue in party political discourse produced a split in the bipartisan approach to immigration policy, a division that extended to the previously bipartisan narrative of the history of White Australia's demise (Brawley). As the Opposition Leader, Howard's past record in this area meant that the Coalition's attitude on non-discriminatory immigration was less well-defined than Labor's: while ALP sitting member Graeme Campbell, had, in November

¹ By the time of the native title debate, Howard was operating with a different emphasis: a bipartisan resolution to mark the 30th anniversary of the 1967 referendum could not be reached because of his refusal to include Labor's reference to the referendum being passed with the intent that the 'race power' conferred could "only be used for the benefit of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people" (Short

1995, been disendorsed for “trafficking in racism” (Franklin and Stark 1), it was the pre-election public statements on race issues by Liberal Pauline Hanson and Nationals Bob Katter and Bob Burgess that caused the most controversy. As was examined in Chapter One, Howard’s 1988 remarks followed the lead of historian Geoffrey Blainey. In the 1996 ‘race debate’ Howard again re-stated Blainey’s beliefs in his opposition to the ‘black armband view’ of Australian history.

The ‘black armband view’ that Blainey, Howard and others reject broadly refers to the historiographic prominence, since the late 1960s, of studies of the historically conflictual nature of Australian society, and particularly accounts of the settler colony’s inception and development in relation to indigenous people. This recent focus has served as a reaction/correction to what W.E.H. Stanner condemned in 1968 as “the great Australian silence” (27) on Aborigines that had to that point been practiced by Australian historians. While studies of race and convictism had featured in historical writings up to the 1850s (Evans 83), Stanner’s claim was borne out, that a “cult of forgetfulness [had been] practised on a national scale” (25), and had dominated Australian historiography until the late 1960s. Since then, scholarship on this ‘white-washed’ relationship has proliferated and substantial contributors to the field have included Henry Reynolds, Charles Rowley, Ann McGrath, Andrew Markus, Ann Curthoys, and Bain Attwood.² In the early 1970s Reynolds observed that the dominant historical image used by colonists writing of the frontier was of “drawing a curtain over the past” (“Violence” 472). The evidence of similar manifestations of historical ‘forgetfulness’ or ‘disremembering’ in nations such as the US and Canada leads Ray Evans to believe that “there is something in the nature of white-settler societies, roughly imposing themselves, via processes of ‘conquest migration,’ upon pre-existing social orders, which encourages this persistent myopia” (83). Beyond this resemblance, the dominance of consensus historiography into the 1960s appears to be a uniquely Australian phenomenon (Evans 83).

The challenge to the monologue of Australia’s past has been driven by different forms of

and Windsor 5).

² For a useful survey of the development of this field, see Attwood, “Aboriginal history.”

history – women's studies, social history, and, especially in the recuperation of Aboriginal experience, oral history. Contributions from Aborigines, women, and other historically oppressed groups have ensured that white male dominance of Australia's national narratives has lost its status as 'History.' Evans' identification of frontier history as the first to challenge consensualist accounts of Australian history (88) helps account for the centrality of race relations within current historiography. More nuanced accounts have emerged since the early studies of black/white relations,³ as some historians believe the emphasis upon conflict and resistance has obscured examples of acculturation and accommodation between black and white, as well as at times making sweeping generalisations about contact which ignore temporal and regional differences in the arrival of Europeans (Attwood, "Aboriginal History" 41). The strength and vitality since the 1960s of histories of black-white conflict and Aboriginal history, written both by and on Aborigines, has created a large volume of work documenting white Australia's past relationship with indigenous peoples. The force and implications of these forms of history have created a strong presence in national political discourse for many indigenous issues, including the formation of ATSIC, the Royal Commission into Black Deaths in Custody, and the process of reconciliation. The most contentious in this line of developments has been the 1992 Mabo High Court decision,⁴ which allowed the attempt to prove native title on crown land. Specifically, the work of Henry Reynolds in North Queensland helped create the legal basis for the 1996 Wik decision, which, following from Mabo, allowed the potential co-existence of pastoral leases and native title.⁵

All of these issues have combined to force a more general re-evaluation of the status of Australia's indigenous people. Paul Keating addressed this altered focus in his December 1992 Redfern speech to herald 1993's International Year of the Indigenous People. This was an inclusive version of the nation's history that emphasised white society's failure to acknowledge the basic rights of Aboriginal peoples. In it Aborigines were represented as the affinitive other,

³ Reynolds' *The Other Side of the Frontier* first substantially addressed the creative and adaptive abilities of Aborigines, as historical agents, in resisting the onslaught of white settlement (Attwood, "Aboriginal History" 36-37).

⁴ The issue of land rights at a national level had been dormant since the Hawke Government's abortive attempts of the 1980s.

⁵ See *The Law of the Land*.

a post-colonial redefinition of identity composed to move away from, while simultaneously acknowledging, the shameful associations of the colonial past. In Keating's view, a lack of national maturity or wholeness was attributed to the condition of indigenous people: "we cannot give indigenous Australians up without giving up many of our own most deeply held values, much of our own identity – and our own humanity" ("Redfern Park Speech" 228). Keating saw it as a "test" that "we recognise the fact that, complex as our contemporary identity is, it cannot be separated from Aboriginal Australia" ("Redfern Park Speech" 227): the intertwined subjectivity of the settler subject with the indigenising 'native' is clearly signalled. The implications of this social democratic history, of the need for societal reparation to historically oppressed groups within a greater recognition of the conflictual structure of Australian history, has been vigorously contested by the 1996-elected Coalition government. An abrogation of any responsibility for Aboriginal dispossession has proceeded through a highly selective use of history: where the appeal to the common whiteness of the Australian birthright is an imperative for societal unity grounded in the privileging of 'mainstream' white Australians, the destructive impact of this same history on Aboriginal people is ignored, sealed off by temporal distance and a sudden declaration of the need for 'equality' for all Australians. Contemporary Aboriginal experience has in this way been evacuated of any historical dimension.

The rejection of the 'black armband view' of history is an opposition to this entry of Aborigines into the historical and social consciousness of Australian society through recent historiography. In 1993 Professor Blainey identified a 'black armband view' of history and attributed its dissemination to Manning Clark, the only 'source' offered by either Blainey or Howard in their statements on the 'black armband view.' Yet a vast collection of historical work with varied focuses is marked by the use of this phrase, with any study of Aboriginal-white relations given specific political implications by virtue of its subject matter, regardless of merit.⁶ In the article "Drawing up a Balance Sheet of Our History," published in the July-August *Quadrant* of 1993,⁷ Blainey sought to evaluate the relative merits of Australia's history. He wrote of the

⁶ It is probably relevant that Reynolds, by inference the chief proponent of the 'black armband view' of history, is the husband of a Labor senator.

⁷ This was the transcript of a paper Blainey gave as the 1993 Latham Memorial Lecture in April.

traditionally dominant “Three Cheers” view of history, recently challenged by the ‘black armband view’; while the latter represented a “swing of the pendulum from a position that had been too favourable,” it was now an “opposite extreme that is even more unreal and decidedly jaundiced” (11). Primarily through Aborigines’ technological lack and “wasteful” system of land use (an argument invalidated by the High Court’s recognition of native title), Blainey emphasised the primitiveness, diversity, and absolute otherness of the Aboriginal race in positing the impossibility of an initial treaty between Phillip and the Sydney Harbour Aborigines. This proposal tendentiously focused on the moment of initial settlement as *the* moment when the destructive bearing of white towards black was irrevocably fixed – like Hanson’s use of cannibalism (see below), Blainey’s use of ‘first contact’ invokes a paradigmatic (and single) cross-cultural encounter to mitigate the entire destructive course of black/white relations.⁸

Other elements of the shift in indigenous affairs that accompanied the election of the Coalition government in 1996 have a basis in Blainey’s “Drawing up a Balance Sheet of Our History.” Democracy, one of the “major credits on the national balance sheet” (13), is seen to be under threat from (unnamed) rights-demanding minorities. Blainey sees a valid parallel between the history of black oppression and (a yet to be coined) ‘politically correct’ view on race: “the vilification of Aborigines by Europeans who lived in the nineteenth century is now almost matched by the vilification of those same Europeans at the hands of presentday moralists, scholars, journalists and film-makers” (15). This is a similar equation to that made by Pauline Hanson’s ‘trading of places,’ in which the history of black oppression in Australia is posited as negligible compared to the ‘silencing’ of ‘mainstream Australia’ of the last twenty years.⁹ The underlying values in Blainey’s article appear to be that the economic and democratic successes of white Australia, documented in a century of consensus historiography, and having inevitably usurped a primitive and inert Aboriginal lifestyle, de-legitimises histor(iograph)y which focuses on Aborigines and other ‘minority groups’: the historical focus should be on positive achievements, or as Don Watson has put it, “witless, celebratory history” (qtd. in Evans 93).

⁸ In a similar way conservative commentators have analysed the composition of the First Fleet to reject the idea that Aboriginal Australia was invaded (see Land, *Invasion and After*).

⁹ See previous chapter.

Apart from the “vilification” of today’s Europeans, and a lack of pride in Australian history, Blainey is concerned that “schoolchildren are often the target for these views” (11), and concludes his article with the warning that “young Australians” are at risk of being “deprive[d] of their inheritance” (15). The choice of children as being particularly at risk from the influence of the ‘black armband view’ is a rejection of ‘intergenerational guilt,’ a term frequently introduced by those rejecting white society’s responsibility for past wrongs, seemingly calculated to polarise debate. The possibility of ‘guilt’ appears particularly salient for conservative commentators; in 1992, even Paul Keating, by implication one of the leading advocates of the ‘black armband view,’ dismissed the relevance of guilt in the recognition of historical wrongs (“Redfern Park Speech” 229). The strategic need to prevent this flow of ‘guilt’ has also been raised by John Howard.

When John Laws interviewed Howard in October 1996, at the height of the Hanson inspired ‘race debate,’ Howard asserted that “Some of the school curricula go close to teaching children that we have a racist bigoted past to tell children whose parents were no part of that maltreatment, to tell children who themselves have been no part of it, that we’re all part of a, sort of, a racist bigoted history, is something that Australians reject” (Interview with John Laws 22). In this statement Howard does not reject the *truth* of a “racist bigoted past” (although this is implied in the rejection of the terms “racist” and “bigot” in Australian society), but its relevancy, or appropriateness, for the modern Australian nation – the parallel to the often castigated absence of the teaching of wartime atrocities in Japanese schools is all too obvious. The presence of the ‘black armband view’ within the national narrative is rejected because it is seen as culturally corrosive. This is a received history of events of national pride which supports Howard’s designated teleology of nation, an explicit enactment of Stanner’s “cult of disremembering” (25). Of concern to Howard is those “children whose parents were no part of that maltreatment” – white children. The “rhetoric is of saving the nation, or preserving a lifestyle, of protecting the future of (some) children” (Dale 13).

This selective version of historical responsibility was well established: in his pre-election

appearance on *Four Corners* in 1996 Howard declared that “It’s very important that we don’t as a nation spend our lives apologising for the past” (“Average Australian Bloke”),¹⁰ worrying that to do so disturbed the “sense of comfort” which Australians should have for their history. Howard’s well-publicised desire for Australians to be “comfortable and relaxed,” reiterated several times on the same program, can therefore be seen to directly inform his opposition to the ‘black armband view’; there is a necessary racial specificity to this appeal for a national history to be of only a proud and heroic tone and approach.

In response to the teleological authority which the historical facts of dispossession and legal fact of native title have granted Aborigines, there has been a concerted conservative effort to absolve Australian society of the historical legacy of white settlement, and to refocus national identity as a ‘mainstream’ identity that is necessarily white. In discrediting the ‘black armband view’ of history, the Prime Minister challenges the authority of emergent narratives of injustice from Australia’s past:

This ‘black arm band’ view of our past reflects a belief that most Australian history since 1788 has been little more than a disgraceful story of imperialism, exploitation, racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination. I take a very different view. I believe that the balance sheet of our history is one of heroic achievement. (“Liberal Tradition” 9)¹¹

Fundamental to this conservative strategy to re-authenticate white settlement as *the* worthy, ‘heroic’ origin of the modern Australian nation, is a twofold attempt to demonstrate the *pastness* of Aboriginal culture – the concerted distancing of the damage done to this culture by white invasion which sustains opposition to the ‘black armband view’ – and a denigration of what Aboriginal culture and its bearers have to offer the modern Australian nation, which has been the role played by Pauline Hanson. Both elements of this conservative distancing of the

¹⁰ Howard also prefaced his rejection of the ‘black armband’ view of history in his Menzies address with an entreaty to “ensure that our history as a nation is not written definitively by those who take the view that Australians should apologise for most of it” (“Liberal Tradition” 9).

¹¹ Beyond the obvious ideological likeness of Howard and Blainey, the presence of the 1993 concepts of the ‘black armband,’ the swinging pendulum, and the balance sheet in Howard’s 1996-97 speeches on race issues suggests Blainey’s immediate input.

history of colonial dominance are, significantly, replete with evidence of the continued existence of colonialist thought in Australian society, demonstrating the importance of Australia's settler origins to contemporary definitions of Australianess. For both Hanson and John Howard, a consistent denial of the historicity of the Aboriginal situation contradicts their own historical valorisation of the mythic symbols of the 1950s: Menzies, the nuclear family, and a monoculture unified by its whiteness and Britishness.

Since her election, Pauline Hanson has consistently sought to efface indigenous authority by invoking Aboriginal primitiveness. In April 1996 Hanson responded to allegations of past white-to-black atrocities by citing anthropologist T.G.H. Strehlow's description of "just one of the many instances of brutality by black against black" ("Hanson urges community" 8), a massacre at Finke River in central Australia. This placed the emphasis not on retaliatory black to white violence, but on Aboriginal society as inherently self-destructive, before the impact of white invasion. From the white settler perspective, this is an explicit replacement of *their* (i.e. Aborigines') savagery for *ours* (i.e. whites),¹² and works to condone or justify the destructive impact of white invasion by demonstrating the lack of worth to be attached to *all* Aboriginal culture. Hanson chose the beginning of National Reconciliation Week in 1996 to again raise allegations of Aboriginal savagery.¹³ In May and early June, Hanson and *Courier-Mail* columnist Lawrie Kavanagh¹⁴ made assertions of cannibalism of whites and Chinese by Aborigines.

Hanson's comments are an explicit invocation of the primitiveness of Aborigines: "Will the descendants of those blacks who cannibalised Chinese miners on the Palmer River in 1875 be required to bear the guilt of their forefathers?" (qtd. in Franklin and Priest 1) – the intended answer to this question is an emphatic *yes*. Such statements, ostensibly made in the interests of re-establishing an 'objective history,' are designed to suggest traits inherent to Aboriginality

¹² Black-on-black savagery also informs the always-available accusation of factionalism which many Aboriginal groups are subjected to – accusations of infighting that feed the related trope of Aborigines as unrepresentative.

¹³ The distancing of Aborigines from 'civilisation' that is being attempted here recalls National Party leader Tim Fischer's comments during the 1993 Mabo debate about Aborigines' 'failure' to invent the wheeled cart.

which render Aborigines outside of modernity. Accordingly, Hanson's conception of national identity has no space for Aborigines: unlike most politicians, who at least pay lip service to the process of reconciliation, she rejects it. It is Hanson's express belief that current Australian society owes nothing in terms of recognition of, or reparation for, past wrongs inflicted on Aborigines, and that Aborigines have no special significance as contributors to the national identity. Even the reduced Coalition/Howard definition of reconciliation, with its specifically limited focus on redressing social and economic advantage,¹⁵ is dismissed as "a failed concept and [one which] should be abandoned. It is the creation of black activists and the 'Aboriginal industry'" (qtd. in Franklin and Priest 1). The invocation of cannibalism determines the unimprovability of colonialism's Other (Slemon 164), with the cannibal encounter serving as the "special, perhaps even defining, feature of the discourse of colonialism" (Hulme 3). This focus on the stereotypical fear for the white settler – of consumption by the indigene – therefore foregrounds that which Hanson rejects, the historical production of an interlinked white and black consciousness.

The rejection of Aboriginality that gained the most attention was the allegation of cannibalism raised in the Hanson manifesto *The Truth*. These claims, made without anthropological or historical basis, focus on the ultimate in the self-destructive, vanishing race trope, the cannibalisation of children. National One Nation party director David Ettridge put the argument like this: "The suggestion that we should be feeling some concern for modern-day Aborigines for suffering in the past is balanced a little bit by the alternative view of whether you can feel sympathy for people who eat their babies" (qtd. in Roberts A6) – the use of the present tense confirms the intent of this strategy. This juxtaposition of a past (and historically false) 'unacceptable' practice with the 'civilisation' of modernity contradicts the frequent excuse made for the destructiveness of invasion: the impropriety of judging white settlers from the perspective of the late twentieth century. This mitigating factor in the impact of invasion is forcefully defended in Hanson's *The Truth*, again within the context of a call for the restoration of historical balance (123). Unlike white Australian civilisation, Aboriginal society is allowed

¹⁴ See "A fair dinkum Crusoe story hits the mark," and "Why dig up our Ancient history?"

¹⁵ The following chapter examines the limitations that the Coalition has placed on the process of reconciliation.

no historical development, as Aborigines who have ‘civilised’ are said to have lost their culture and authenticity. This is a paradigmatic use of authenticity to create a hierarchy whereby Aborigines become contentious claimants to authenticity, a manoeuvre which rests on displacing ‘real’ Aborigines into a long-distant past, such that contemporary Aborigines are, post-invasion, necessarily inauthentic. The sustained attack from both John Howard and Pauline Hanson on what they represent as the ‘Aboriginal industry’ is an example of this demonstration of inauthenticity, as ATSIC and other Aboriginal organisations represent a ‘professionalisation’ of Aboriginality which denies Hanson’s emphasis on the primitive.

Hanson’s articulation of cannibalism in a debate on reconciliation serves as what Johannes Fabian has termed an allochronism: “the production of a textual network that mediates subject-object relations across cultures, and that works to deny the possibility of coevalness between the knowing subject and the cultural ‘specimen’ being described” (Slemon 165).¹⁶ This allochronism functions to “*place the referent(s) of anthropology in a Time other than the present of the producer of anthropological discourse*” (Fabian 31). Benedict Anderson’s argument about temporality in *Imagined Communities* suggests that there is a kind of teleological necessity to making this displacement and denying the coevalness of the two cultures if the ‘nation’ is to be affirmed. This is not a need for total replacement, but a temporal displacement of the other, which betrays an inability to deal with the narrative coexistence of a shared history: “One of the principal functions of the indigenising narrative is to legitimise the settler; to put the settler in the cultural and discursive place of the indigene whose physical space has already been invaded” (Lawson, “From Asymptote to Zeugma” 17). Aborigines are therefore consistently placed within a time of ‘savagery,’ removed from, and, as authentic Aborigines, forever unable to attain, any degree of civilisation. This trope of a self-destructive race is historically one strategy in the replacement of the indigene with white figures of indigeneity – the explorer, the pioneer, the farmer – as the settler subject draws from “its own history of apprehensions and its own history of representations” (Lawson, “Postcolonial Theory” 23). Given that it also functions to emphatically place Aborigines outside of the nation’s narrative, Hanson’s demonstration of the irretrievably savage nature of Aborigines

¹⁶ My argument here follows Stephen Slemon’s use of Fabian’s allochronism in relation to cannibalism.

works in a similar way to Howard and Blainey's opposition to the 'black armband view' of the past.

As with his view on the benefits of 'free speech,' Howard's rejection of the 'black armband view' of history depends on a belief in the historical tolerance of Australian society, despite the damning record of white/black relations and the official racial discrimination of the White Australia Policy. Crucially, Howard has frequently attributed the sole blame for the upsurge in racial intolerance which accompanied the 1996 'race debate' to Pauline Hanson, apportioning blame in a way that exempts or excuses "ordinary Australians" from accusations of racism. In his May 1997 attack on Hanson, Howard said that "Australia was a deeply tolerant, fair-minded and generous society and it would be a mistake to criticise backers of Ms Hanson as bigoted, narrow-minded and racist" (qtd. in Willox 1). This qualification continued a consistent view that the Prime Minister had put forward about the historically tolerant and non-racist nature of Australian society. Howard's focus on Hanson's sole responsibility ignores the fact that her rise to prominence is in part enabled by Australia's relatively recent history of a nationalism constructed in explicitly racist and racial terms, as evidenced by her quotation of Arthur Calwell in her maiden speech (3862).

The Prime Minister's denial of the presence of racism in Australian history has generated a reluctance to discuss the issue. The John Laws interview was one of several occasions on which the Prime Minister, specifically invited to address the issue of increased racial intolerance in the community, chose instead to challenge the implications of recent historiography. The existence and implications of the 'black armband view' of history, an ostensibly homogenous interpretation of history established by Manning Clark, became the agenda, not the level of racism or the public manifestation of extreme views. In this interview Howard attributed the pro-Hanson feeling to the fact that "whenever you've tried to raise the subject of immigration they've been banged on the head" (14).¹⁷ This narrative holds Labor/media forces responsible for the racialisation of experience – the repression of comments on race has caused racism.

¹⁷ The confused relational qualities of this statement – the attempt to claim solidarity with the listeners through 'you' (you've) contrasts the distancing of 'they' (they've) – again suggest Howard's personal stake in past examples of speaking out on race.

This assists a legitimisation of expressions of racial intolerance, granting racism a rational basis, emerging, as Howard sees it, from an unreasonable/irrational repression of ideas on race or 'free speech' in general. Therefore informing the introduction of the black armband trope is a characteristic reversal in the denial of racism: it is not white, 'mainstream Australians' who unjustifiably hold racist views, and therefore require correction, but those who have expressed the 'black armband view' who are at fault.

Similarly, in the October 30 1996 parliamentary debate on racial tolerance, Howard's concern was the need for "understanding" those who had reacted against the imposition of a 'black armband view' of the past or other intolerable expressions of anti-racism. In this racial tolerance debate, Howard rejected with "vigour" the notion of intergenerational guilt, and established this rejection as the qualifying factor to the Coalition's endorsement of the process of reconciliation. He went on to say

I profoundly reject with the same vigour what others have described, and I have adopted the description, as the black armband view of Australian history. I believe the balance sheet of Australian history is a very generous and benign one. ("Racial Tolerance" 6158)

As with all invocations of the 'black armband view' of the past, the expression that Howard has made something of a political and personal crusade¹⁸ to reject was used without any proof or sources apart from the (uncited) authority of its originator, Geoffrey Blainey. The existence of this ill-defined concept is specifically used here as an authorisation for speaking against the previous policy orthodoxy on race. The suggestion that the "balance sheet" is a "very generous and benign one" in a discussion of Australia's relationship with other races, with the history of Aboriginal oppression and the official racism of the White Australia Policy, suggests the process Ray Evans' describes as a movement from conflict denied to conflict averted. It is this process which in 1906 prompted the *Bulletin* to claim, despite the sustained frontier violence of the previous century, that "A White Australia will never have to fry a nigger at the stake" (qtd. in Evans 84). Howard proceeded to call for renewed leadership, not, as Opposition Leader

¹⁸ See Fitzgerald, "The history of John Howard," for an analysis of the history texts of Howard's school

Kim Beazley did, for a direction to be given to the discussion on immigration and Aboriginal affairs, but in the articulation of pride in Australia's history.

Howard therefore distinguishes between what must be valorised as worthy history, essential to the consolidation of national pride, and the recall of events that support a 'black armband view' of the past and thereby debilitate the nation. As was apparent in the election campaign, this proud history extends to events such as the abolition of the White Australia Policy and the instigation of the 1967 referendum on Aborigines' rights, which self-evidently take their significance from the racism and oppression which they ostensibly ended. Only events of national pride are deemed worthy of admission to the nation's time, its national history, as the more recent historiography of the 'black armband view' is rejected because of its challenge to the long-established 'truths' of history. Communism, disloyalty, and 'un-Australianness' have also been associated with belief in this 'apologetic' view of the past: in response to the *Courier-Mail's* sustained attempt in August 1996 to brand Manning Clark a "Soviet agent of influence," Howard said that "It's too negative ... I think his black armband view of Australian history has been negative" (qtd. in Johnstone 1).¹⁹ For Howard and Blainey this is not a conventional view of a 'black armband' as a mark of respect for the deceased, but is disdainfully viewed as an unnecessary and unpatriotic mourning of past suffering.

The strategy of demonstrating the pastness, irrelevance and inappropriateness of Aboriginal culture and experience has also been applied in the Howard Government's response to the Stolen Generation inquiry. Correspondence between Howard and Northern Territory Chief Minister Shane Stone revealed, on October 7 1996, the Prime Minister's misgivings over the Stolen Children inquiry. In comparison with Paul Keating's attitude of recognition of past shame in Redfern in 1992 – "We committed the murders. We took the children from their mothers. We practiced discrimination and exclusion" ("Redfern Park Speech" 229) – the dominant response from Hanson and the Coalition has been one of denial and disavowal. The practice of 'stealing' Aboriginal children from their parents and communities was accordingly

years.

¹⁹ To identify Clark's work as sustained by negativity demonstrates that it is political strategy, not historical scholarship, which informs the deployment of the 'black armband view.'

described by a Howard spokesperson like this: “This episode was not a particularly satisfactory one in the country’s history but there are challenges that lie ahead” (qtd. in Ceresa 1). This glib treatment of the destructiveness of assimilation capitalises on talkback radio resentment at having to feel ‘guilt’ for what happened ‘over 200 years ago.’ Howard rejected a national apology to the ‘Stolen Generation’ through deploying a similar argument to that opposing the ‘black armband view’ of the past: “present generations of Australians are not responsible for the errors of earlier generations” (qtd. in Gordon 1). The argument that responsibility does not apply to current-day Australians is another example of the splitting of historical events; to follow Howard’s logic, the significance of ANZAC day to Australians will disappear with the passing of the last Gallipoli soldiers. In this way opposition to the ‘black armband view’ is deployed to excuse very recent racist practices such as ‘stealing’ children or restricting the movement of Aborigines on reserves, both of which persisted into the 1970s.²⁰

The distancing of the damage done to Aboriginal society by the removal of children also depends on a hierarchisation of suffering. Nazism, and the explicitly formulated and violent racism it embodies, is perceived as an undeniable fact, and is an important object of opposition within the democracies of the West in the second half of the twentieth century. It appears to be seen as an irreplaceable, ultimate signifier of ‘racism,’ or the ultimate expression of racial hatred. The paradigmatic suffering of the Holocaust, as expressed in the example of the Nazi-Jew persecution and terms such as genocide, is withheld from Aborigines in their attempts to describe past and present oppressions. The distance from the moral and historical force that the establishment of such a relationship would allow is strictly maintained. This was revealed through Prime Minister Howard’s immediate rejection of the comparison Brisbane Lord Mayor Jim Soorley made in April 1997, when he likened the rise of Hanson to the beginning of Hitler’s policies. Howard attacked Soorley’s “absolutely abysmal understanding of history” (qtd. in Riggert 12).

Similarly, the use of ‘genocide’ to describe the policy of removing Aboriginal children from

²⁰ For a study of the ‘Stolen Generation’ see Read, *The Return of the Stolen Generations*, and see Markus, *Australian Race Relations*, on the persistence of the restriction of the basic freedoms of Aborigines.

their families, with the term's close association with the Holocaust, has been disallowed by Federal government sources. The example of the Nazi/Jew persecution is withheld as an untouchable extreme, a signifier of suffering to which the 'Stolen Generation' will not have access to. The power of the term is further suggested by the sustained attempt of Pauline Hanson's manifesto *The Truth* to disprove the claim. This includes a concerted refutation (118-20), examples of 'real' genocide, including that carried out by Aborigines against the previous inhabitants of Australia (138-47), and the selective use of the UN's definition of genocide, with the proposition that "since the Aborigines still exist, the idea that a holocaust occurred is nonsense" (138-39), ignoring the section of the definition which includes the 'removal' of children. The use of a powerful anti-racist discourse is therefore denied to those who have been subject to obvious manifestations of racism.

This sustained conservative agenda of positioning the damage done to Aboriginal people and their culture as inexorably in a past which is outside of Australian historiography, represented by John Howard as Australia's history, combines powerfully with Pauline Hanson's emphasis on the atavistic nature of indigenous culture. Howard consistently seeks to deny Australia's unique history of the imposition of a carceral and colonial society: "Only in Australia ... did colonial capitalism begin with the combination of expropriation of the original inhabitants, the forced labour of convicts in a military prison farm, and the transformation of the overseeing officer class into one of nascent capitalists" (Buckley and Wheelwright 1). Those opposed to the 'black armband view' perceive 'history' as having universal application as it was constructed before the writing-in of Aboriginal perspectives on white arrival to the land, and maintain that only events which speak well of Australians should be allowed in to the teleology of nation.²¹ Different histories will not compete for authority in Australia's national narrative; only one understanding of the past will provide the basis for the construction of the Australian future. The frequent statement of the need to 'redress the balance' is a plea for a resurgent historiography which will posit a peaceful, tolerant past, full of events to be celebrated, which requires little, if anything, in the way of present redress for past dispossession.

²¹ Henry Reynolds' productive reading of those who stood against past racism in *This Whispering in Our Hearts* provides an interesting challenge to Howard's simple equation of ANZAC-Bradman-Menzies as 'good' history.

Chapter 4: The Extinguishment of Native Title

Conservative opposition to the public prominence of indigenous issues has been most vehement when confronting native title. One of the most significant symbolic and material gains for indigenous people in Australia, native title was established by the High Court's 1992 Mabo decision and Labor's 1993 Native Title legislation, and was forcefully re-introduced to national political debate by the Wik decision of December 1996. Native title both acknowledges the importance of land to Aboriginal cultures, and challenges highly valorised concepts in Australian national mythology of the land and the 'man on the land.' This clash makes native title an issue of great magnitude – like his Labor predecessor Paul Keating, Prime Minister John Howard assumed personal responsibility for his government's legislative enactment of native title, resolving the Wik decision without significant involvement from the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs John Herron. This chapter examines the strength of conservative reaction to native title, in terms of what the opposition to native title reveals about the views on Aboriginal rights held by Pauline Hanson and the Liberal/National parties.

Labor's 1993 legislative enactment of the Mabo High Court decision had always been opposed by the Coalition on the basis that it was 'unworkable' and failed to provide 'certainty' for farmers and mining interests. In contrast to Labor's (in principle) acknowledgment of native title as an integral part of reconciliation, for conservatives native title has invariably represented a problem to be rid of because of its perceived effect on resource management, national legitimacy, and white property rights. As part of this impulse the

National Party has insisted on a sunset clause in the legislative enactments of both Wik and Mabo; in his address to the nation on Wik in November 1997, Prime Minister John Howard confirmed his sympathy with this view when he commented that “the sooner we get this debate over and get the whole issue behind us the better for all of us”²² (Howard, Wik Statement). There has been little recognition from conservatives of the centrality of land to Aboriginal cultures or its restorative capacity for Aboriginal societies; rather there has been an almost blanket opposition and denial of the validity of native title. This resistance was epitomised by then Opposition Leader John Hewson’s 1993 decision that Coalition members would abstain from voting on the Mabo Bill in the House of Representatives, even on amendments that were supported by miners and farmers. Although some National Party senators crossed the floor to support these industry amendments, the overall effect of Hewson’s insistence on having no part of the passing of the Bill was to leave parliamentary conservatives completely excluded from the debate.

The Coalition brought this background to the native title issue with its election in March 1996. When the Wik decision was handed down on 23 December 1996 the Coalition had yet to implement its proposed changes to the Native Title Act, anticipating that the Court would confirm that the issuing of pastoral leases extinguished native title. The High Court’s ruling that the two forms of land title could coexist, albeit with preference given to the rights of pastoralists in the event of conflict, prompted an often hysterical public ‘debate’ which was of greatest intensity until May 1997, when the Federal government and State Premiers agreed to implement John Howard’s ‘Ten point plan.’ Wik was again a prominent public issue when the Bill was first put to parliament in September-December of the same year, and was said to have been finally ‘resolved’ with the passing of Howard’s amended ‘Ten point plan’ in July 1998. Unlike Mabo, which was implemented by a Labor government that looked upon it favourably, Wik was fundamentally opposed by the Coalition and handed down in a climate of heightened anti-Aboriginal sentiment in the community – the 1996 ‘race debate.’ The National Party and the peak farming lobby group, the National Farmers’ Federation, consistently represented

²² As with the Coalition’s 1996 electoral slogan of ‘For All of Us,’ in this equation it would seem that Aborigines are ‘them.’

Wik as a judgment that unjustifiably disadvantaged their constituents.

The public presence of Pauline Hanson's ideas was used to fuel the climate of anti-Aboriginal sentiment and significantly misrepresent the impact of the Wik decision. As part of this strategy, Queensland National Party Premier Rob Borbidge, one of the most rancorous opponents of native title,²³ claimed that the Wik decision made Hanson more dangerous than previous populist politicians:

in respect of Wik and Native Title the difference this time around is that people's properties are being taken off them. And if you want to see angst and you want to see anger, you're seeing it across rural Australia because of the judicial theft of property, perpetrated by the High Court. (Interview with Cathy Border 2)

Such deliberate misrepresentation of the High Court's rulings has been widespread. Despite the High Court's insistent protection of freehold land, conservative participants in both the 1993 anti-Mabo and 1997 anti-Wik political campaigns have consistently claimed that (freehold) "back yards" could be claimed under native title. Borbidge, National Party leader Tim Fischer, and Special Minister of State Nick Minchin (Howard's chief negotiator during the establishment of the 'Ten point plan'), all claimed at various stages that freehold land was under threat from native title.²⁴

The importance of these public positions is not their relation to judicial reality, but the attempt to broaden concern over the effect of native title beyond the narrow interest base of rural landholders and their political representatives to include more common concerns – if possible, national interests. It is for this reason that "*back yards*" are chosen as the focus of these arguments, as an attempt to expose to threat an Australian icon, the space of family upbringing, barbecues and cricket. This bid to broaden Wik's scope reached its height with the use of

²³ Borbidge called for a referendum on native title and an overhaul of the High Court in view of its 'judicial activism'; his suggested alterations to the High Court were remarkable for their fundamental challenge to the 'separation of powers' doctrine.

²⁴ While such claims are groundless, their legitimacy has been greatly assisted by the inclusion of great expanses of freehold land in some ambit native title claims, which do not conform to the High Court's preconditions for seeking native title and would have no possibility of success.

maps to demonstrate the land potentially available for native title claim – here native title is an attack upon the sovereign existence of the nation itself. Maps such as the “Before Wik/After Wik” presentation, which was a feature of a government funded campaign in February 1998,²⁵ render the nation in such an unfamiliar way as to demonstrate the incompatibility of coexistence. The use of the terms ‘Before’ and ‘After’ Wik also denies the concept of native title, seeing it as being ‘invented’ by the High Court – only ‘modern’ use of the land is acknowledged as an effective inscription of presence. The creation of racial tension by these campaigns itself legitimates the reasoning by those such as Borbidge, that a ‘hard-line’ resolution to Wik was necessary to appease racism. As one of the National Farmers’ Federation ads aired at the height of the Wik debate asked, “Can Black and White Australians live in harmony when the High Court’s Wik decision on native title has created uncertainty, especially for farmers?” (qtd. in Bachelard 1).

These exaggerations of the extent of claims allowable under Native Title legislation ignore the fact that Aborigines’ ability to claim native title is crucially limited. The germinal Mabo ruling placed the burden of proof on Aborigines, who must have retained a traditional connection to the land to the present day. This insistence on traditional connection “shift[s] the burden of history from the fact of expropriation to the character of the expropriated” (Wolfe 122). The ability to claim native title on unalienated crown land – by implication land of little value to the colonising culture – that is permitted by Mabo excludes the majority of Aboriginal people. As Wolfe maintains, no “dismantling of the logic of elimination” (123) occurred with the High Court’s Mabo decision, with the requirement for physical connection effectively rewarding the colonisers for dispossession, even though Aboriginal resistance was being entitled.

John Howard’s initial ‘Ten point plan’ further restricted Aborigines’ ability to register as native title claimants through an insistence on physical connection up to the date of the Wik decision, removing the Keating government’s inclusion of spiritual connection to the land as a valid basis

²⁵ The advertisements, after unfavourable responses from test groups, were never publicly released. They were printed in Holt. “Taxpayers slugged.”

for registration for a native title claim. This stand was slightly relaxed in the Howard government's eventual legislation, the Native Title Agreement brokered with Tasmanian Independent Senator Brian Harradine, in which a parent's physical access qualified as a right to register as a native title claimant, though this registration had to be achieved through court. This bill was finally passed in the wake of the One Nation Party's success in the Queensland election of June 1998, with Harradine compromising in the face of Howard's continued determination to call a double dissolution on Wik and create a 'race election,' which would have seen the National Party and One Nation engaged in directly competing scare campaigns over the implications of Wik. As well as eliminating the potential for most Aborigines to claim native title, the High Court's authorisation of traditional connection to the land in *Mabo* provides native title opponents with recourse to a view of Aboriginality as primitive and archaic.

Conservative arguments against native title have consistently maintained that Aboriginal use of the land is incompatible with national resource management: Aboriginal land is "rendered 'empty' in the sense that it is 'unproductive' ... it is incompatible with the productive interests of a modern nation" (Gelder 163). In this scenario national 'competitiveness' and Australia's international respectability as an industrialised nation are endangered by Aboriginal use of the nation's space. The land is presented as a unit in the economic system, the sole purpose of which is to generate wealth: discursively, the place of *terra nullius* "has been taken by conceptualising any moves to recognise the relationship of Indigenous Australians to their land and waters as running counter to the prerogative and imperatives of 'land management'" (Nettheim 79).

Yet for people such as the Wik, who had obviously never been physically excluded from their traditional land, a successful native title claim would represent the formalisation of Aboriginal access and title, not its invention: "The research informing the Wik decision found that the *de facto* coexistence of pastoral lease holders and Aborigines had deep historical roots" (Nicoll 180). Despite this precedent, there has been almost no recognition from the conservative side of politics of the potential for land to be shared, only a focus on

the ‘uncertainty’ brought to bear on the activities of pastoral leaseholders. This chapter now addresses the question of why conservative representations of native title have so consistently overstated the possibility of successful native title claims and the effect of native title, with arguments based on deliberate inaccuracies and appeals to inherent racial prejudice – why the conservative side of politics has opposed native title *per se*.

In a material sense, those most affected by the native title rulings are rural landholders and those with established financial interests in mining and pastoral activity, elements which find their political representation in the National and Liberal parties. The Mabo judgment ended colonial appropriation of the national property; in 1996 the Wik decision provided a more fundamental challenge with its positing of physical coexistence, of the possibility of shared ownership and title of pastoral lease land. Unlike debates on reconciliation or the appropriateness of apologies for past actions, Wik also necessitated actual material cost to ‘Australians,’ and on a larger scale than the Mabo decision, though still limiting the possibility of native title to those Aborigines who had been able to maintain a traditional connection to the land. While this helps account for the hysteria which was such a dominant feature of the conservative response to the Wik decision, a similar reaction occurred to the Keating government’s enactment of the Mabo Legislation in 1993,²⁶ when the economic consequences were of even less significance, given Mabo’s predominantly psychic threat to white land ownership.

To explain the extreme nature of the conservative reaction therefore involves moving beyond economic motives to examining what the High Court’s decision reveals about the coloniser’s movement into the indigenous space of Australia. This is not to ignore the extent to which the Coalition has used the Wik decision to legalise the privatisation of vast tracts of Australian land, allocating benefits to pastoral leaseholders which go well beyond abating the impact of the Wik decision. John Howard’s 1988 justification for opposing land rights is of interest here: “Land rights is fundamentally wrong, because what land rights

²⁶ See, for example, Attwood, *In the Age of Mabo*, Curthoys, “The Politics of History” or Cowlshaw, “Did the Earth Move For You?”

inevitably leads to is large-scale alienation of enormous sections of Australia to a very few people" ("Why I Am Right" 157). Because of the potential rewards to accrue to select pastoralists under the 'Ten point plan,' this 'socialist' or 'egalitarian' argument, which was also prominent in the opposition to Mabo in 1993, was absent from the conservative discourse of 1997-98. To shift the focus from the extent of material gain for pastoralists, the National Farmers' Federation consistently conflated the interests of farmers with those of leasehold graziers (Bachelard 78), and emphasised farming as a familial activity (see below). The financial implications of Wik were especially pressing for Rob Borbidge in Queensland (and Labor's Wayne Goss before him) and Richard Court in Western Australia, where the possibility of coexistence meant that their disregard for the conventions of the Native Title Act when issuing pastoral leases exposed their governments to massive compensation claims. However I see these 'land grabs' as opportunities that have arisen from the intrinsic conservative opposition to native title, rather than being fundamentally constitutive of it.

The conservative rejection of native title is instead essentially driven by the threat it poses to traditional national and historical narratives. The High Court's rejection of the doctrine of *terra nullius* in its native title rulings demonstrated the illegality of the 'originary' act of the colonisation of Australia. The legitimacy of white presence in the land, rhetorically established through the valorisation of exploring, pioneering and farming narratives throughout Australian history, was challenged by the legal/historical discourse of Mabo, with its specific enshrinement of Aboriginal use of the land as a pre-existing right and confirmation that Aboriginal occupation of the land constituted a culturally and judicially legitimate form of ownership. The High Court's native title rulings have been particularly threatening to conservative ideology because of the ways in which they diminish the prized history of imperial endeavour and white rural sacrifice in the creation of the Australian nation. Since the 1970s, when Labor shifted from its strong racist nationalist emphasis and became a party which also sought to appeal to an urban middle class, this history of imperial endeavour and rural struggle has for the most part been upheld solely by conservatives. This conservative insistence on upholding one 'true' Australian history and its implications has produced an

inability to contemplate the incorporation of those other than the white Australian into the national identity.

Many conservatives, especially public figures such as Hugh Morgan and Geoffrey Blainey, saw Mabo, the initial manifestation of native title, as a danger to Australia's sovereignty. In this way "Australia [was] imagined as an indivisible and possessed whole, enclosed and complete, its 'Australianess' thus residing in [the] exclusive possession of the continent" (Attwood, "Mabo" 113). The Wik decision, while still only relevant for those Aborigines with a traditional connection to the land, goes further than Mabo in that it allows physical coexistence and a hybrid form of land use and ownership. While both rulings subvert the settler's claim to have successfully occupied the land, Wik most threatens the white frontier mentality:

The salient ideological effect of the frontier was that it rendered spatial coexistence anomalous. As a linear metaphor that expressed the invasion's zero-sum polarity, the frontier divided "us" and "them" into discrete and homogenous domains whose relative proportions were constantly shifting in favour of "us." (Wolfe 102)

The continued existence of native title in rural Australia is so significant because rural Australians are closest in relationship to the land that white Australia has occupied in the indigene's place. In a cultural and historical sense they have long been 'the most' Australian – those who have displaced Aborigines through their own form of indigeneity, in terms of literally occupying indigenous space. This appropriation and subsequent performance of natural primacy has been revealed as unmistakably false by the Wik decision's demonstration of the secondariness of pastoral leaseholders to Aborigines, in their 'failure' to fully supplant the always-existent indigene. The High Court's demonstration of the white settler's failure to fully occupy the land is therefore paradigmatic of how "the archaeologies of colonized land and pre-invasion history disrupt the telling of civilised stories in post-colonial space, by implanting the wild beneath every 'civilised' step" (Johnston 32). Wik's imperative to share the land is therefore a discursive/psychic dilemma that the High Court's guarantees about the leaseholders' interests overriding Aborigines' where conflict occurs cannot overcome.

In response, much of the conservative reaction to native title has been designed to reject the indigeneity or priority of the Aboriginal occupation of Australian space, and to claim it for rural, white Australians. As National Farmers' Federation President Donald McGauchie argued,

The people whose lives are most affected by this Bill – now and in the future – are families. They're families who are perhaps the third, even fourth generation to live and work their particular piece of land. They have their own "special" places of significance on their land, and a strong spiritual attachment to it. (McGauchie)

This is a concerted attempt to evacuate the powerful discourses of sacred or 'special' sites of any *Aboriginal* significance – McGauchie's focus on a longstanding, spiritual attachment to place directly challenges the specificity of the importance of land to Aboriginal cultures.²⁷

This conservative rejection of the 'specialness' of native title (and other pro-Aboriginal developments in Australian society) is based on the dynamics of racial *envy* (Cohen 90), as public opinion has been mobilised against the legitimacy or 'fairness' of native title. The ambivalence of this envy – "it involves the desire to possess certain idealized attributes of the Other and the desire to destroy them because they signify what is felt to be lacking" (Cohen 90) – can be identified in Pauline Hanson's statements, in her efforts to re-naturalise the white settler position of founder of the nation, and at the same time to reject Aborigines' claims to indigeneity.

Hanson's dissemination of long-lived stereotypes of laziness and criminality, which maintain the 'undeserving' status of Aborigines, support her claim that the Aborigines' place in the anti-racist teleology of nation is an inauthentic one. The true 'victims' in a 'politically correct'

²⁷ The spiritual/sacred association is the most difficult for white Australians to sustain, given the destructive impact of much mining and farming activity, but nevertheless shows remarkable tenacity. In the anti-land rights campaign of the early 1980s, the Australian Mining Industry Council in Western Australia under Hugh Morgan attempted to propose a 'religious basis' for mining (Libby 59).

society are the “mainstream Australians.” With the – “I am fed up with being told, ‘This is our land.’ Well, where the hell do I go?” (3861) – of her maiden speech, the perceived loss of the authenticity of white presence in the land and the rejection of indigenous authority are obvious. It is this impulse which lies behind Hanson’s direct claim to be “indigenous” by birthright (Meryment 1) – again an attempt to empty the term of any specifically Aboriginal meaning. Of course Hanson has not been asked to leave her land: her inability to countenance coexistence becomes an imagined threat of dispossession, which repeats the fear of invasion that drives her anti-Asian racism. In this reversal of the colonial paradigm it is Hanson and “the multinational mining companies who are dispossessed by Aborigines ... [it is the Aborigines] who do not respect boundaries, who are seen to be mobilising a spatial strategy to reclaim the nation-place” (Gelder 162-63).

For Hanson the ‘signified lack’ of white indigeneity that Aborigines represent requires removal – the inherent right of Aborigines to own and share Australia, a concept established by Mabo, but more explicitly by Wik, with its possibility of co-existence, must be rejected. Hanson’s consistent expression of a desire to “repeal the native title act, abolish Wik and Mabo” (“Launch of One Nation”) is seen to be valid because its appeal is affective, not logical (Lawson, “From Asymptote to Zeugma” 6), drawing an emotional legitimacy from a recent past when the ‘settler’ occupation of the land was relatively unproblematic.

This colonialist either/or mentality has been central to conservative reaction to the High Court’s native title decisions – the settler’s status as a natural, naturalised part of the environment is seen to depend on a representation of the other as absent: “The land/indigene must be figured as an absence, leaving textual, psychic and physical space for the settler-invader to inhabit” (Johnston 25). It is Wik’s positing of the coexistence of Aboriginal and Australian space, even more fundamentally than Mabo, which produces such vehement rejection of it: “The movement into indigenous space must be asymptotic: indigeneity must be approached ... but never touched” (Lawson, “From Asymptote to Zeugma” 19). Coexistence is therefore represented as an intolerable competition for space – the second of the National Farmer’s Federation ads featured a black and white child competing

in a desperate game of Twister.²⁸ With competing for space in this way, the historical and complete separation of white and black experience that centres the colonialist view of the past is mirrored by the physical separation that this absolute denial of coexistence insists upon.

This threat of proximity to the indigene has been a powerful trope throughout white Australia's history, but has revived and intensified at crucial moments in the public debates on native title and race relations. In the lead up to the 1996 Federal election National Party candidates Peter Cochran and Michael Cobb began scaremongering over the removal of inner city Sydney Aborigines en masse to rural townships (Henderson, "Nats just can't shake racist smell" A15). Other notable examples have included Port Lincoln Mayor Peter Davis' identification of 'mongrel children' – "if you are a child of a mixed race, particularly, if you will, Asian-Caucasian or Aboriginal-white, you are a mongrel and that's what happens when you cross dogs or whatever" (qtd. in Ramsey, "Mayor's 'mongrels' claim" 6), made at the height of reaction to Pauline Hanson's maiden speech, as well as the allegations of Aborigines' practicing cannibalism, with the ultimate distance which cannibalism represents, raised by Hanson herself during Wik negotiations in April 1997. Significantly, one of the National Farmers' Federation advertisements which was televised at this time featured a blindfolded farmer hampered in his attempts to fence his property: the frustrated 'man on the land,' with his family watching on helplessly, will no longer be able to maintain the boundaries of his land. When threatened by such "sins of proximity" (Lawson, "From Asymptote to Zeugma" 19), the conservative impulse has been to reinforce and redraw modern, imperial boundaries – the announcement of the Wik decision immediately prompted the National Farmers' Federation to announce the 'end' of reconciliation (Windsor, "Aboriginal reconciliation dead" 4).

Despite the desire for physical and temporal separation of Aboriginal and white which is at the basis of such rejections of Aboriginality, conservatives have been generally willing to use the

²⁸ The use of children in this ad caused Aboriginal negotiators to withdraw from talks with the National Farmers' Federation.

term reconciliation, with the symbolic bringing together which it implies. These contradictory impulses suggest that underpinning the conservative definition of reconciliation is a core belief that Aboriginal culture is not desirable or sustainable in the modern Australian nation, and that reconciliation requires Aboriginal identity to mean no more than white Australian identity. The Coalition's version of reconciliation becomes a crucial site for the articulation of subordinate, limited conceptions of 'Aborigines,' on the basis of the rejection of the validity of both coexistence and the Aboriginal identity from which it is derived. In this context reconciliation becomes little more than a code term for assimilation.

Howard government representatives have consistently favoured a focus on health, housing and education, which without attendant goals of Aboriginal cultural and spiritual maintenance amounts to a 1950s assimilation agenda. This limitation was a feature of the ultimate form of the parliamentary motion on racial tolerance, drafted in October 1996 at the height of the 'race debate.' As Sid Spindler points out, earlier drafts of the motion, which emphasised the importance of maintaining indigenous culture and connection to the land, and stressed the recognition of the past injustices suffered by indigenous people, were vetoed by the government. This reflected the fact that the government's definition of reconciliation, as Howard established in the debate on the motion, was contingent upon the erasing of guilt over past events.

Land rights have no place in the Coalition's definition of reconciliation – this reconciliation has been predicated on the undermining, to the point of *de facto* extinguishment, of Aborigines' native title rights. Before the Wik decision had been handed down Howard responded to a native title claim by the Larakia in the Northern Territory with the warning that it "could undermine the reconciliation process" (qtd. in Gordon and Windsor 1). The Coalition's rejection of the Wik decision required a legislative elimination of the difference from which Aborigines derive the 'special' right of coexistence. The *de facto* extinguishment of native title enabled by John Howard's 'Ten point plan'²⁹ depends on an

²⁹ As Anthony Phillips suggests, Howard's relentless repetition of the need for his 'Ten point plan' was

impulse to 'equalise' the rights of native title holders and pastoralists, despite the fact that the High Court found native title more analogous to government rather than leaseholder rights: "Our position has always been that all Australians should be treated equally, and that it was a denial of that to have a right to negotiate for one section of the community that was denied to others" (Howard, Interview with Matt Peacock).

This deployment of a particular meaning of equality has been fundamental to the Howard government's indigenous policies, emphasising the 'sameness' of Aborigines, assimilating them at precisely the moment of the High Court's recognition of significant rights with regard to land tenure in Australia on the basis of prior and particular usage. There is a necessary blindness or complete disregard for the land-based nature of Aboriginal culture operating here – in November 1997, as his legislation was first put to parliament, Howard asked that Aboriginal leaders "separate [the Wik Bill] out from the reconciliation process. There is no reason why people who disagreed with us on the Wik legislation shouldn't work with us to achieve reconciliation" (Interview with Kerry O'Brien).

The Howard government's proclamations on reconciliation determine that Aborigines have no special or original place as Australians, just that they are disadvantaged, and by implication, disadvantaged by their own cultural heritage. The inclusion of Aboriginal cultural and spiritual beliefs or gestures towards self-determination in attempting to improve living standards are seen as part of the waste and misuse of public money, or an endorsement of primitive Aboriginality, stereotypes which dominate discussion of Aboriginal affairs. Images of primitive Aboriginality can therefore be used to dissipate Aborigines' 'special' rights – one of the failed government-funded anti-Wik advertisements in February 1998 featured an isolated, transient shack; the obvious 'third world' implication was ironically highlighted by the caption underneath of "The Great Australian Dream."

"as if the very rationality implied by 10 points could negate, or better still repress, the emotional heat native title was generating" (165).

It is with welfare that the link between the misuse of public funds and Aboriginality is most consistently made. In his May 1997 Longreach address to pastoralists on Wik, the Prime Minister rationalised racism in asserting that he ‘understood the resentment’ caused by unequal social security privileges (“New Believers”). This equation of land rights with welfare also occurred in the 1993 anti-Mabo campaign, when Tim Fischer claimed that the Government was chartering flights to transport alcohol to remote Aboriginal communities (Kitney 7). Former ATSIC leader Lois O’Donoghue characterised such associations as an emphasis on “‘citizenship’ rights at the expense of ‘indigenous rights...’ It is using the fact of our disadvantage to undermine our political claims” (qtd. in Windsor, “Aboriginal policies” 2). There is a clear ‘splitting’ of Aboriginality sought by the association of native title and welfare provision – Aborigines who pursue ‘political’ claims such as the High Court’s recognition of native title are seen to bring into question other elements of their ‘ordinary’ rights.

The emphasis on disadvantage, rather than political achievement, has been a consistent feature of the Coalition government’s attitude to Aboriginal issues, and has dominated its dealings with ATSIC. As the representative body for Aborigines, ATSIC has since its inception in 1990 been held accountable for all failures in the area of Aboriginal affairs and for the dangerous difference it represents. For Pauline Hanson, the political representation for Aborigines offered by ATSIC has caused damage to the sovereignty and the unity of the nation: “It has helped create two Australias and has failed dismally to help those it was meant to serve” (“Launch of One Nation”). This is a position that Howard has emulated in defence of his government’s attitude towards ATSIC: “Any notion of self-determination which intrudes the idea of a nation within a nation is something that I am totally opposed to” (qtd. in Tingle 1). The impulse to abolish ATSIC over the divisive ‘special’ representation which it provides is a version of equality based on Pauline Hanson’s insistence that all Australians be treated equally, and therefore that there should be no protection of the rights of minority or ‘other’ groups, as evidenced in her pledge to repeal the *Racial Discrimination Act* after One Nation’s success in the 1998 Queensland election (Meryment 1).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs Minister John Herron has led the Coalition government's dealings with ATSIC. At a time when he was dismissing criticism of his paternalistic approach, Herron opened his first meeting with the ATSIC board in April 1996 with a tale of his time in Rwanda as a medical worker, including his successful negotiation of a confrontation with an armed and menacing Rwandan youth.³⁰ With his credibility in dealing with Aboriginal issues linked to this background of white moral heroism, Herron spoke of his intention to intermingle photos of impoverished Aboriginal children with impoverished Rwandan children to indicate the difficulty of differentiation. While the sentiment may be well-intentioned, it confirms the symbolic articulation of Aborigines to poverty-stricken Black Africans, unable to help themselves, and requiring benevolent white health workers to ease their suffering. Aborigines are also emphatically distanced and their savagery is reiterated, specifically as an expression of irremediable tribalism. The Rwanda tale therefore invokes the colonial tradition of political control through philanthropy, and established the general assimilationist tone of protection that guided the Coalition agenda – that the genuinely needy Aborigines required looking after, not land rights.

At crucial moments within the paradigm of reducing Aborigines' 'special rights,' there emerges an attack on fundamental rights, rights which (unlike welfare) have long been unquestioningly extended to the rest of Australian society, as the logic of this determination to have 'equality' becomes an emphasis on exclusion. In April 1996, during an ongoing court battle about his government's right to install a gas pipeline, Queensland Premier Rob Borbidge threatened to cease his government's provision of basic services such as health and housing to the Gunggari Aborigines, because they had exercised their (legally recognised) right to claim native title over parts of far south-west Queensland (Priest 2). In a similar vein to Borbidge, Pauline Hanson has expressed the doubt that Aborigines would have been given the vote if 'Australians' had known of the increased recognition of Aboriginal rights which, according to Hanson, had followed from it: "if Australians knew today what was foreshadowed for them, they would have thought twice

³⁰ For an account of this meeting, see Smith, "Cool Hand Herron."

about casting that vote” (qtd. in Abraham 2). The fact that the fundamental rights of Aborigines can be threatened in such a way, and that the making of these threats can cause relatively little reaction in the public arena,³¹ betrays the fact that until very recently Australia has been a ‘*Herrenvolk*’ democracy, with the Enlightenment ideal of equality applied only to limited sections of the populace:

The scope of applicability of the egalitarian ideals was restricted to ‘the people,’ that is, the whites, and there resulted what I have called ‘*Herrenvolk* democracies’ – regimes such as those of the United States or South Africa that are democratic for the master race but tyrannical for the subordinate groups. The desire to preserve both the profitable forms of discrimination and exploitation and the democratic ideology made it necessary to deny humanity to the oppressed groups. (van den Berghe 17-18)

Throughout Australia’s history Aborigines have been deliberately subjected to completely different applications of ‘government’ than that of the ‘egalitarianism’ and democracy that increasingly characterised white society. For Aborigines the selective application of notions of ‘equality’ is once again revealed by the priorities of the ‘Ten point plan,’ as the historical construction of Aborigines as *less than* is mobilised. The common law rights of Aborigines, established by the High Court’s Mabo decision, are seen as being insignificant in comparison to the economic priorities of the nation. Resource security and equality before the law are constructed as being incompatible, and it is the equality and cultural beliefs of Aboriginal people that must give way. Further, the infringement of these rights is to be carried out at the expense of the taxpayer, not the pastoral leaseholders who benefit from it. Like the ‘socialist’ type arguments against Mabo, John Hewson’s 1993 warnings about the financial threat to ‘our children’s future’ have also been absent from anti-Wik arguments.

The desire to ‘equalise’ has required a recuperation of assimilationist practices from Australia’s past, including a challenge to the condemnation of assimilation as a method for

³¹ Criticisms of Hanson focussed on her factual inaccuracy in stating that the 1967 referendum enabled Aborigines to vote, as much as the explicit racism of her suggested disenfranchisement of Aborigines.

eliminating difference. This is despite the fact that ideologies of ‘equality’ for all (as well as Liberal models of individual advancement) find their ultimate contradiction in assimilation era policies, through which “governments acted upon indigenous Australians as categories of persons with common, disabling, characteristics” (Rowse 121). In responding to the revelations of the ‘Stolen Generation’ inquiry, members of the Howard Government have again positioned the maintenance of Aboriginal culture as antithetical to material benefit – in this case, for the ‘stolen’ children themselves. Government backbencher Wilson Tuckey claimed that “In any materialistic [sic] sense most Aboriginal children who were removed to mission schools or adopted by white parents have benefited substantially and many were no worse off socially than those white children who went to boarding school,” an emphasis which Aboriginal Affairs Minister John Herron endorsed: “a lot of people have benefited by that” – the practice of removing children from their families (Both qtd. in “The Herron Comments”).

Prime Minister John Howard’s reactions to the *Bringing Them Home* Report included a refusal to apologise on behalf of the nation, and a discussion with radio talkback host Alan Jones on whether those Aboriginal people “who received a very happy home life and a very, very happy upbringing” (Howard, Interview with Alan Jones) in white homes or institutions had been left out of the report.³² Apologies and personal reparation for those who had suffered under this process become unnecessary; the government had recourse to the established conservative discourse on race which articulated any ‘minority’ funding to national disunity, with compensation for the ‘Stolen Generation’ characterised by Attorney-General Daryl Williams as “extravagant and divisive” (qtd. in Sweetman 3). The significance of the admissions of wrongdoing regarding the fate of the ‘Stolen Generation,’ which are raised for their innoculatory value, is ultimately excused by the ‘good intentions’ of the perpetrators of the practice, as demonstrated by Jones in the Howard interview:

³² The possibility of whether the \$1.4 billion Indigenous Land Fund, established for the benefit of dispossessed urban Aborigines, could be used to compensate native title holders disenfranchised by Howard’s ‘Ten point plan,’ was also canvassed in this interview. Whether it should have been used for this purpose was not of concern – there is obviously no regard here for the differing circumstances of Aboriginal communities in Australian society, just a desire to compensate ‘Aborigines.’

I don't think we need to go on about how tragic it is that people are abused in any walk of life, indigenous or otherwise. But is there any documentation about Aborigines, indigenous Australians, living today who've been educated and cared for under that kind of regime who may not have been with us if they hadn't been removed from the dangers of their childhood environment?

Both Howard and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs Minister John Herron have therefore emphasised the 'good intentions' of those responsible for the 'Stolen Generation' process, in accordance with their belief in the historical tolerance of Australian society. In this way the fundamentally racist nature of the practice can be excused: "in strategies of defense, the crucial condition of responsibility for negative action lies in intentions: good intentions are seen as implementations of good attitudes, and hence as characteristic of good social membership or good citizenship"; these denials are "strategically very effective, since the accuser has few ways to actually prove negative intentions" (van Dijk 91). This appeal to the distance between intention and outcome made to absolve current Australian society from responsibility is nevertheless a revealing one. The distance between good intentions and effect, and the disparity between democracy for all and the reality of the subhuman treatment of Aborigines in Australia's history, are very unlikely to have been tolerated if they had occurred to significant elements of the white population.

The dominant conservative response to the High Court's foregrounding of Aboriginal indigeneity in its native title rulings has been to reject the status of white society as 'interloper' in favour of a reinstatement of the settler subject as the "'natural,' national subject" (Johnston 18). For conservative interests, property rights become inviolate only upon the arrival of white settlement in Australia, not before, and depend on 'civilised' notions of land use. This colonialist either/or paradigm dictates that the presence of one culture is dependent on the absence of the other, as the failure of whites to completely possess the land becomes a paranoid vision of indigenous empowerment and expansion. The realisation of the desire to eliminate the potential coexistence of pastoral leases and native title depends on an assimilation of the *difference* of Aborigines that has enabled

them 'special' rights according to their historical dispossession, rights that again become contingent in the maintenance of national identity and effective resource management.

Conclusion

The 'balance sheet' of John Howard and Geoffrey Blainey, and their conception of the objectivity and independence that it implies, has driven the Federal Coalition government's attitude on race issues since 1996, and gained precedence in Australian public/political debate. This discourse was prominent well before the election of the Coalition government – Opposition leader Howard's 'headland' speech of December 1995 contains many of the elements of the conservative discourse that gained ascendancy from the time of the 1996 'race debate.' In this speech Howard said "Our national character springs not from particular ideologies but from mainstream, egalitarian values" ("Politics and Patriotism" 4), and proclaimed that "Tolerance has been one of our distinguishing virtues for a very long time. It's easy to lose sight of that fact because there is a school of 'history' which ignores or trivialises all those parts of the past which can't be conscripted into glorifying a politically correct version of the present" ("Politics and Patriotism" 6).

The formulations of one of the other 'silenced' public figures of the 1980s, Geoffrey Blainey, have regained considerable public legitimacy. His denigration of the 'black armband view' of history, blanket rejection of native title, and attack on the level of Asian immigration have all had a powerful media presence. While discriminatory immigration was not accepted as policy, the principle of Asian immigration was again subjected to sustained public hostility, with the implications this sentiment has for any person of 'Asian' appearance. The considerable influence of Howard and Blainey is a challenge to the popular representation of Aborigines and other minority groups as being oppressively powerful, and opens to question the sense of virtue, as attacks on 'political correctness,' which almost seemed to be attached to public denigration of some of these groups.

The remarkable ability of Hanson, Howard and Blainey to credibly occupy victim status in the place of, and at the expense of, groups who have been oppressed throughout Australian history, is authorised by a self-describing discourse of invasion, racism, oppression and cultural loss. While a refusal to acknowledge Aboriginal disadvantage informs Hanson's disregard for the notion of redress for past wrongs, Howard's position is contradictory. His assertion that the pendulum of Aboriginal rights and historical interpretation has swung too far is made alongside an acceptance of the fact that Aborigines remain the most disadvantaged group within Australia: his rejection of the current status of Aborigines is designed to authorise the Coalition's shift away from Labor's endorsement of self-determination and native title for Aboriginal people.

The representation of the victimisation of white Australians so successfully concealed the question of the relative power of white and minority groups that it was not bounded by any sense of reality. This representation reached its peak with Queensland Premier Rob Borbidge telling rural audiences that the Wik decision meant that whites were being sold into slavery (Stephens and Kingston 33). On one level, an explanation for the strategy employed here is easily ascribed to electoral gain – polling indicated that the National Party vote increased after Borbidge had made such statements on native title (Stephens and Kingston 33). The preparedness to so blatantly misrepresent not only judicial reality but the relative socioeconomic status of whites and Aborigines, also contained in other deployments of extreme rhetoric (especially by Hanson) betrays an almost complete inability to contemplate the establishment of any Aboriginal rights. Such false interpretations allowed Howard to represent his 'Ten point plan' as a compromise, between the demands of the National Party (and Hanson) and Labor's weakened support for Aboriginal self-determination – these appeals to anti-Aboriginal racism are mobilised to maintain the relative positions of black and white. The hysteria generated by the coexistence posited by the Wik decision reflected the role of 'otherness' that Aborigines have occupied throughout white Australian history, and the psychic and material white-rural dependence on the emptiness of the indigenous space that Aborigines have occupied.

Unlike the previous recent manifestations of ‘race speech’ in the 1980s, there was no government opposition to the extreme ideas and rhetoric of the ‘race debate’; in fact the Prime Minister remained one of the few prominent politicians to offer a degree of support for Pauline Hanson’s expression of her views. Howard’s leadership of a Coalition government returned to power after thirteen years of opposition placed great emphasis on further encouraging the type of discussion on race issues that had dominated talkback radio for many years. Pauline Hanson’s maiden speech was characterised as an example of the new freedom of speech flourishing under Howard’s government; this version of freedom of speech increasingly appeared to involve immunity from criticism for conservative politicians. Howard’s tolerance of Hanson’s views appeared to be based on a level of agreement with her ideas and a belief in the need to appease racism and racists. This policy of appeasement towards Hanson’s ongoing racism was proven incorrect, as Hanson increased her support to the extent that she formed her own party, and One Nation later replaced the Liberal Party as the conservative party with the second greatest parliamentary representation in Queensland at the 1998 Queensland State election.

Despite Howard’s denial of the racism of Hanson’s supporters and Australian society, his extreme reluctance to oppose her supporters was a recognition of the popularity of racism, heralded by the massive electoral swings to Hanson and others who had used racial politics in the 1996 election campaign. This denial of racism was drawn from the Coalition’s conception of the past, which differed significantly from Labor’s: Howard and Blainey not only insist on the impropriety of judging the past negatively, but recuperate many of the values and attitudes which informed Australia’s past. From this strategy emerged a patriotism directed against racial difference within the nation, which sought to exempt past and present manifestations of ‘Australianness’ from criticism. An appeasement of those who upheld these projected Australian values was consistently applied in the ‘race debate’ and in a variety of ways – through extolling the benefits of free (race) speech, in reducing Aboriginal welfare and immigration, and achieving the *de facto* extinguishment of native title. The prevailing feature of the ‘race debate’ – that having suffered under a “pall of censorship” on racial issues, it was now permissible to say whatever was believed – legitimised the Howard

government's changed emphases on Aboriginal rights and immigration. The authorisation of this racism in the public sphere demonstrated the importance of the uses to which racism can be put – its *most* useful application came with the resolution of the native title question in favour of mining and pastoral interests, without regard for native title as an integral part of Aboriginal culture. All of these moves were in accord with Hanson's nostalgia for white Australia and rejection of the presence of Aborigines in the national identity.

Hanson's views have been at the forefront of the conservative reaction to positive public representations of Aboriginality – the recognition of native title and an endorsement of the process of reconciliation – as well as historical, judicial and political inquiry that has sought to refigure the role and position of indigenes in narratives of the nation. The Liberal Party's self-defining opposition to Labor ideals has contributed to an unwillingness to contemplate the 'Labor view' on Aboriginal issues. For the Hanson/Coalition agenda, with its exclusive focus on health, housing and education, Aboriginality once more becomes a condition to be transcended, and indigenous rights lose considerable legitimacy in the political sphere. The portrayal of Aboriginality as an ahistorical 'problem' was sustained by the exclusion of Aboriginal experience from Australia's 'history': "The oscillation between black as problem and black as victim has become, today, the principal mechanism through which 'race' is pushed outside of history and into the realm of natural, inevitable events" (Gilroy 11). The Coalition's return to assimilation in tone and approach regarded the maintenance of Aboriginal culture as antithetical to increased standards of living. This returns to an idea dominant in white Australian society throughout much of its existence, that it is Aboriginal culture and essence, not white society, that has been largely responsible for the plight of Aborigines. When Pauline Hanson, Tim Fischer and others find it necessary to *remind* Australians of the 'primitiveness' of Aboriginality, they suggest that it is acceptable, as it always has been, to hold Aborigines responsible for the effects of colonialism.

Hanson's racial sentiment was able to be mobilised so that the derivation of her anti-Aboriginal sentiment from previous institutionalised racisms was able to be plausibly denied, instead rationalised as being drawn from her own personal, ordinary experience. This was an

envious, because wronged, lower-middle-class angst. Despite the claims about the negative view of the past supposedly held by those who subscribe to the 'black armband view' of history, the appeal of Hanson, accompanied to office by the Coalition's special pleading of "For All of Us," was sustained by a deep-seated dissatisfaction with the state of Australian society. This discourse remained removed from explicit manifestations of racism: "The reformulation of Aboriginal humanness as not fulfilling the conditions of citizenship in the present is through constructions of difference based on ostensibly [a] cultural, rather than racial criterion" (Morris, "Racism" 68). In a time of increased Aboriginal rights, Australian citizenship was re-affirmed as ordinary and white rather than 'special': for those unable to countenance coexistence the 'equality' of Aborigines needed to be asserted and the validity of native title rejected. Aborigines who pursued 'political' claims such as the High Court's recognition of native title constantly had their lower socioeconomic status deployed against them – native title is a 'special' entitlement that subverts the 'mutual obligation' central to the Coalition's conception of welfare provision. Aborigines are seen to be undeserving of the 'special' rights and place in the national mythology from which they had so recently been almost completely absent.

While Hanson's agenda was one of sustained denigration of the importance of Aborigines to Australian society, her popularity contradictorily depended on the presence of Aboriginal or other race issues in the public sphere. The public expression of Aboriginality that was facilitated under Labor was therefore redefined as a discourse on race that constantly invoked the 'undeserved' presence of Aborigines in Australia's national identity as being evidence of the need to once more discriminate against them. As Paul Abbott has argued, "whereas repression banishes its object into the unconscious, forgets and attempts to forget the forgetting, discrimination must constantly invite its representations into consciousness, reinforcing the crucial recognition of difference which they embody and revitalising them for the perception on which its effectivity depends" ("Authority" 15). This discriminatory discourse has a confused operation: "though oppressive, [it] is never strictly repressive: it must sustain itself on the *presence* of the very difference which is also its object" (Abbott, "Authority" 16).

The need for the presence of the object of discrimination offers a reason for Hanson's failure at the 1998 Federal poll. With the Wik native title decision resolved in the Coalition government's favour, race issues were almost completely absent from the election campaign. Prior to this point, and even after One Nation's success in the Queensland election which caused Senator Harradine's backdown on the 'Ten point plan,' Prime Minister Howard had been willing to progress to a double dissolution on Wik, despite the probability of the prevalence of the type of 'race speech' that had dominated political debate since Hanson's election in March 1996 in any such 'race election.' The studied absence of the issues of Aboriginal welfare and Asian immigration from the 1998 Federal poll was part of the Coalition's effort to ensure that Hanson did not gain a public profile in the election campaign. The debate on Aboriginal issues was tellingly reopened by Howard on election night – with Wik resolved and the import of the Stolen Generation report substantially diminished, the Coalition-defined version of reconciliation, with its assimilationist assumptions, was to proceed. The evanescent quality of the public 'debate' on race again confirmed that Howard's promulgation of vigorous debate on race issues was limited. 'Free speech' was only maintained until the effect of Hanson's speech exceeded the weight of Howard's personal beliefs and the Coalition's political expediency and threatened to become electorally damaging.

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